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The Flower of Destiny

Old Days of the Serail

By

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The Flower of Destiny

THE FLOWER OF DESTINY

IN the first years of the seventh century, the power and glory of the world were divided between the empires of Rome and Persia. Their frontiers met in a long line till they were separated, as by a wedge, by the barren land of Arabia, which neither Emperor had thought it worth his while to conquer, but in which already burned that spark which was soon to set the world on fire and to consume both their empires.

At this moment the Romans, though unfortunate in war, rejoiced to own the sway of the one sovereign of the Eastern line who was both great and good, Heraclius.

In Persia the time was most fortunate, for after the revolution and civil war which had torn the Empire asunder,

in the time of his father Hormouz, and after he had himself been driven into exile, the Persians beheld, seated on the throne of Sassan, the great Chosroes, under whom Persia and the Sassanid dynasty attained the summit of their greatest glory.

On a morning in the month of May of the year 619, the Shah in Shah, Chosroes, the great King of Persia, was holding his divan in his favourite residence, the wonderful palace of Artemita. The war with Rome was over. Chosroes had been restored to his throne by the Emperor Maurice, whom he thenceforth called his father; but the massacre by the monster Phocas of that good monarch and all his family had broken all his ties with the Romans, and though Heraclius had come as the avenger of Maurice, Chosroes had felt no hesitation in attacking and tearing from him his richest and fairest provinces. Victory had everywhere attended the Persian arms. Within two years the maps of the two empires were entirely changed,

and Chosroes had taken from his rival Egypt, Asia Minor, Palestine, Syria, and even Rhodes, and reconstructed the Empire of Darius.

Now the war was over and the great King was taking his rest and enjoying the fruits of his victory, amid that incredible luxury and splendour which the Oriental writers so love to describe.

On this special morning, the great King sat as usual on his throne in the hall of the divan. This hall was built entirely of white marble carved like lace-work, with airy columns supporting the roof and a whole appearance of fairy-like lightness. At one end on a raised dais stood the throne, which was made of solid gold inlaid with jewels, and on either side of the dais were fountains with broad basins into which the water streamed from the mouths of marble lions.

Nobles and court officials in silk and gold stood around and just below the dais, and in front of the great King was a group which contrasted strangely

in their simplicity with the splendour around them,—three Arabs in robes of brown camel's hair. They were an embassy from a private citizen of Mecca who called himself a prophet, and had gathered around him a certain following, —Mohammed, of the family of El Hashim, of the tribe of the Koresh. This person had written a letter to the King of Persia (or rather it had been written for him, since he could not write), in which he summoned him to acknowledge him as the Prophet of God, and to embrace the religion which he had been sent to reveal. The letter was written in Persian, and Chosroes had read it himself, and still held it in his hand while he looked at the Ambassadors with a contemptuous curiosity.

"I had heard of your master," he said, "as one who had made some little stir in his own insignificant country, but his insolence in sending such a message to the King of Persia is incredible."

"O King," replied the foremost of the ambassadors, "disdain not the message we bring you. It is the truth, and will prevail with or without the aid of earthly kings. There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet!"

The face of Chosroes flushed with a sudden anger at the Arab's boldness.

"In Persia," he said, "we know but one God, Ahuromazda; one prophet, Zarathustra—Spitama! . Go back to your master, the camel driver of Mecca, and tell him that you have delivered His letter, and that this is the answer of Chosroes."

And with one turn of his strong hand he tore the parchment in two, and threw it into the fountain on his right, where it floated for an instant, and then disappeared.

In the harem of the royal palace were collected the most beautiful women who could be bought for money in the markets of the world: not Persian only,

though they had held the palm of beauty, but Syrians, Egyptians, Greeks, maids from the wilds of Turkestan, dark Indian maids, and maids yellow, but beautiful, from the Celestial Empire. And still other maids from far and unknown countries who themselves knew not whence they came. And all these bloomed together in the harem of the Shah in Shah; a bouquet culled for his delight, of the fairest flowers from the gardens of the world.

But Chosroes noted them but little; fine clothes and jewels were given them, indeed. They lived sumptuously, had other slaves to wait on them, who were but slaves themselves, and whiled away their time in the palace and its gardens.

Chosroes the great King of Persia, the glory of the house of Sassan, thought of but one, and loved but one, beside whom, indeed, all others paled like stars beside the sun—Sira, a Christian slave, from the banks of the Danube or the Rhine. She knew not indeed

her own origin, but remembered only the mountains, the forests, and the river, and the long journey to Constantinople, where she had been reared like many another for the slave market. Thence in the first budding of her beauty she had been once more transplanted to Persia, and sold to the procurer of the royal harem.

Her history, until Chosroes set eyes on her, had been the ordinary history of a slave. But from the day on which Chosroes had seen her first, the significant part of her life began. From that moment she, and she only, swayed the heart of her royal lover. Then Chosroes had been the Prince, the heir of Persia; now he was the King. Sira had followed him in his flight and had shared his exile; now she shared his glory. Siroes, the one child whom she had borne him, was looked upon as the heir apparent of the throne of Sassan, and Sira, though no princess but a slave, was the real Queen of Persia.

Nor was it to her beauty alone that

Sira owed her empire, but to her intelligence and her fresh and brilliant wit. Hour after hour she could entertain and amuse the great King, and though she had been with him now for years, Chosroes never tired of her, but left her every morning with regret, to return to her every evening with delight. Oh, if women only knew the real secret of their power! Youth and beauty fade, tears and scenes repel; but a man never tires of the woman who can make him laugh.

While Chosroes was holding his divan, Sira sat in the innermost of her apartments alone. This room had a vaulted ceiling and one large window, divided by columns into three. It was decorated in that style which had obtained in Persia since the earliest times. The walls and ceiling were painted green relieved by red and gold, and inlaid with bits of mirror of irregular shape. The floor and the columns which divided and flanked the window were of shining pale green marble, and the

curtains, portières, and cushions of the divan were of green and silver.

A silver brazier, in which perfumes burned, stood in the centre of the room, and in the corners were great vases of Chinese porcelain filled with flowers. Five silver lamps of rare workmanship hung from the ceiling by long chains, and a priceless green Bokhara rug was spread in front of the long low divan on which sat Sira.

The favourite of Chosroes was now in the full bloom of her beauty, with all the rounded softness and voluptuousness of perfect womanhood. Hers was a type rare and almost unknown in the Orient, a Celtic blonde. There were those, indeed, who said that Sira was no woman but a water spirit. She was pale with an ivory whiteness and her hair, which fell in silken ringlets almost to the ground, was a wonderful green-gold. Her lips were like coral, and her teeth like pearls, and more than all her eyes, fringed with dark lashes like a lake with reeds,

were green, green as the purest jade.

The favourite wore a robe of crimson flowered with gold, opened at the bosom, and caught with a jewelled girdle around her waist. Her arms were bare and clasped with jewelled bracelets, and strings of pearls were twisted in her hair.

Sira looked ever and anon with a growing impatience towards the entrance, and presently the portière was lifted, and another woman entered. She was a young woman, slender and dark and graceful, an unmistakable Egyptian, dressed in an Egyptian robe of dark blue silk threaded with silver, a soft clinging robe which followed all the graces of her figure, and left bare the pale olive of her bosom and arms. Her long black hair fell behind her straight and heavy, and a gold circlet set with sapphires crowned her head.

Sira rose to meet her, and clasped her in her arms. The Egyptian returned the embrace, and the two

women sat down on the divan together holding each other's hands.

"Oh, Arsinoe," said Sira, "I am so glad that you have come; I have so missed, so longed for you. There has been no one to whom I could open my heart, none with whom I could really talk while you were gone."

"Yes," said the Egyptian, "I know you love me, and I have thought of you many times while I was beside the Nile. But you know, Sira, my life is given to the study of the stars, and of the magic arts, and my return to my own country was a necessity. I knew much already; but I have learned much more."

"You are not changed," said Sira, "you are as young and as beautiful as when I first came to Persia; and even then they said you had been the favourite of Hormouz for many years."

"Yes," said Arsinoe with a strange smile, "I was the chosen one of Hormouz when he was a young Prince, before he married the mother of Chosroes, the

Princess Gudaferid, in the days of the great King, Nushirvan the Just."

"And you remained his favourite?" said Sira.

"Yes, in spite of all the rest; just as you remain the only love of Chosroes. And you, Sira," suddenly changing her tone, "you too are still the same, Chosroes still loves you, still lays the wealth of the Persian Empire at your feet, and you are as indifferent to him as ever, and your life, in spite of all its splendour, is cold and empty because you know not love."

"Yes," said Sira, "I am still the same. Chosroes thinks that I love him; every one thinks so; no one suspects the truth. I enjoy the power and splendour of my life; but I am weary of it all. God alone knows how weary of that love which is lavished on me, which I see and understand in Chosroes, and which more than all I must feign and cannot feel. Even my child would be more dear to me, if I but loved his father.

"Oh, Arsinoe, I know I am ungrateful to Heaven, for I have everything else, everything but the one thing that I desire, the love for which I long, and without which everything else is nothing."

"Sira," said the Egyptian, "I can read the stars. I know your destiny, and I tell you that you shall have your heart's desire. The love which Chosroes has not been able in all these years to win, will bloom like the flower of morning in your heart, and be given in the moment of its birth to whom it is destined.

"Most women learn to love, but you cannot; with you, love will be the lightning's flash which shines out of the East into the West."

Sira looked at the Egyptian with a new light in her eyes. "Arsinoe," she said, "if you can give me this,—if you can give me this, you have loved yourself."

"Yes," said Arsinoe, "and more than once; I have had all that life

can give! Perhaps it may be still that I shall love again, but now my heart and soul are in my art. But for you, Sira, I will give you your heart's desire. I had not forgotten you, and I have brought you a present."

"What is it?" asked the favourite.

The Egyptian did not answer the question, but went on. "Chosroes has given me a house in the palace gardens, with an entrance in the wall. There I have collected all my treasures, and there will I live with my own slaves in perfect liberty, and in return I will serve the Shah in Shah with all my magic art, and all my knowledge of the stars.

"To-morrow evening Chosroes gives a banquet that will last all night. Tell him that you will come and spend the night with me studying the map of Heaven."

"And will you really teach me to read the stars?"

"Nay, that you could not learn; but I will show you something else that you can understand; something which I

have brought with me from Egypt, the Flower of Destiny."

Sira clasped her hands in delight.

"Is that what you have brought me? Oh, Arsinoe, you are too good!"

"No," said Arsinoe, "the flower of destiny is for myself, though you may see it. I have brought you something else, not from Egypt, but from Persia."

"What is it? Tell me, Arsinoe."

And this time the Egyptian answered: "The most beautiful youth in the Persian Empire."

The next evening before the banquet Chosroes went to pay a visit to Sira, who received him with her usual apparent delight.

The King of Persia was tall and stately, with straight features, black eyes and hair, and a black pointed beard. He might have been called handsome, but for his expression, which was stern, sombre, and impenetrable, and made him seem much older than his age. His early vicissitudes and misfortunes had

left their mark behind; but Chosroes was naturally proud, silent, and reserved, overbearing and tyrannical at times, but generous, quick to forgive, and really good at heart.

Sira alone could make him smile as she alone could make him laugh. His whole heart was hers, and when he was with her he reflected some of her brightness as a deep mountain lake reflects the sunlight; and when he left her, he was like the lake again which, when the light is gone, sinks back into impenetrable blackness.

The Shah in Shah was dressed for the banquet in royal robes of purple, strewn with pearls and diamonds as the sky is strewn with stars. Strings of pearls as large as hazel-nuts were twisted around his neck and on his head rested the royal crown blazing with jewels of enormous size and lustre.

When he strolled in the outer apartments of the palace six pages held his train, but here it dragged carelessly on

the green marble floor. Even the eunuchs were permitted to accompany him no farther than the ante-chamber of the favourite, for Chosroes laid aside his state and came alone to visit Sira.

When they were seated side by side on the divan, Sira told the King of her intended visit to the Egyptian, well knowing that he would not oppose her wishes. Chosroes, indeed, was pleased that she had something to console her for his absence.

"I have not seen Arsinoe since her return," he said; "I must send for her to-morrow. There is no one more faithful to me than she or more useful with her knowledge of magic and the stars."

Sira was a Christian. During their exile she had persuaded Chosroes to beg the assistance of Saint Sergius of Antioch, which he had done with the most excellent result. But the Christianity of the seventh century was like a muddy stream winding through a

low country, less a religion than a superstition.

"Chosroes," she said, "do you believe implicitly in the arts of Arsinoe, her power to tell the future?"

"Yes," replied the King, "one must. She has already mastered one of the greatest of the arts, the secret of eternal youth. To look at her she seems not more than twenty; and yet she was the favourite of my father, Hormouz, before I was born. Since nature has revealed to her this great secret, it is not likely that she has withheld the rest."

Sira's eyes sparkled. "I am very glad that you speak so," she said; "you think, then, that I may trust her in everything?"

"Yes," said Chosroes, "even as I do; and I trust Arsinoe as I do you, my heart's delight!

"Oh, Sira! I have known distress and exile; but you made them sweet, and now that I have raised the throne of Sassan to the summit of its glory, now that power, wealth, and fame are mine,

and there is nothing that I have not, your love is still the brightest jewel in my crown."

Poor Shah in Shah! Poor Chosroes, King of Persia, the glory of the world indeed is yours; but not the love of Sira. And of the two women that you trust, both are false!

When the King had left her, as he did a few moments later, Sira threw around her a dark mantle, and without calling any of her slaves, who during the visit of the King were collected in the ante-chamber, left her apartments by a marble staircase which descended from one of the rooms into the garden. There two eunuchs were waiting her with a Chinese palanquin, into which she stepped. The curtains were drawn, and she was swiftly and silently transported through the flowering alleys and sweetly perfumed groves to the little palace of the Egyptian. There the door was opened by two more eunuchs, and she was admitted into a richly

decorated hall, where Arsinoe met her.

The Egyptian clasped the favourite in her arms, and then led her up a marble staircase, and through several rooms, where Sira turned her head from side to side to look at many things which were not only rich and beautiful, but strange: treasures of Greece and Egypt, India, China, and Japan.

In the last room they stopped, and Sira looked around her in wonder and delight. This room indeed, if not the result of enchantment, was a marvel of the art of the extreme Orient. The walls were hung all around with a Chinese embroidery of birds and flowers on yellow satin. The ceiling was gilded and carved with an open work of carved black teek, from which hung five splendid Chinese lanterns of teek and painted silk, lighted, and filling the apartment with a soft radiance. The floor was a mosaic of yellow and rose-coloured marble.

At one end was a large window in a teek-wood frame, whose embroidered

curtains were now closely drawn, and at the other was the long low Persian divan piled with Chinese cushions of all colours embroidered in silk and gold. Vases of Chinese porcelain filled with roses alternated with carved and inlaid cabinets, and in the centre stood a wonderful table of gold lacquer. On this table stood a magnificent carved vase of jade, in which was growing a strange plant with dark green leaves and one great purple bud.

As Sira looked around her at all these wonders, the Egyptian stood and looked at her. Never had the favourite been more beautiful. Her dress of transparent gauze spangled with silver, through which shimmered rose-coloured silk, was clasped around her waist with a girdle studded with diamonds, and clasped at the bosom with a great diamond star. Her white arms and shoulders were bare even of jewels, but a diamond circlet rested on her head, and her hair flowed down behind her like a golden veil. Rose-coloured and

ivory white, glittering with gold, silver, and diamonds, Sira appeared like the incarnation of the morning.

The Egyptian stood beside her, dark and slender, as always, in dark blue with a glimmer of silver, her black hair falling like a shadow among all the splendour. And *she* seemed like the incarnation of the night. In her hand she held a silver serpent like a little sceptre; and with the other hand she took Sira's, and led her to the table and showed her the strange plant.

"You cannot learn to read the stars," she said, "but this you can read; and it will prove to you that I tell you the truth, and that I know.

"This is the flower of destiny."

With her silver serpent she touched the purple bud, which opened and disclosed a single dewdrop like a great round crystal, lying in its heart.

"Look," she said, and Sira looked into the crystal, and seemed to see through it into another world.

First she saw mountains, forest clad,

and flowing through them a great river. On its banks stood a rude village, and children with yellow hair were playing on the grass. Two black-haired men appeared in strange garments; one of them took one of the children by the hand and led her away, and she knew that the child was herself.

Next she saw a Greek garden in Constantinople, and a dozen little girls sitting in a row, while a man was teaching them to play the lute, and one of them was Sira. Then came a scene which she remembered well. The palace of Modain, and her own presentation to Chosroes. Other scenes followed: the royal flight, the exile. She saw herself passing through many vicissitudes, but always by the side of Chosroes, a mother, with the infant Siroes in her arms. And then appeared once more the palace, and Sira clad in silks and jewels, once more a queen.

Then a wave seemed to overflow the picture, and blot out everything; and then came one image alone, that of

a youth so beautiful that Sira gazed at him as if under the spell of enchantment. But at that moment Arsinoe touched the flower again, and it closed once more into a bud; and Sira, raising her eyes reluctantly, saw standing in front of her the youth himself.

And as her eyes had hung upon the picture, so much more they hung upon the original; and she could only say in a half whisper: "Arsinoe, am I dreaming?"

"No, Sira," said the Egyptian, "you are awake."

Ferhad, at that time just eighteen, was in the first bloom of that wonderful beauty which has made him famous in Persian history and romance.

He was of medium height, slender and graceful, with exquisite hands and feet, and a noble head, covered with short curls of blue-black hair, which he held as if he wore a crown. His skin was a clear pale olive, with a rose flush in his cheeks, and his features were of the purest Persian mould. His

eyebrows were so delicate and perfect that they seemed as if traced with a pencil, and his eyes, fringed with long black lashes, were blue! His lips were so red and beautiful, that they seemed made only to be kissed, and his expression was both proud and sweet.

Ferhad was very simply clad, in the old Persian costume, which strongly resembled the fourteenth-century doublet and hose—his doublet, which fitted him closely, being of ruby red edged with a line of gold, and his hose of soft undressed leather. His feet were encased in red shoes, and he wore nothing on his head, and no jewel anywhere.

Sira moved a step or two nearer to this new wonder. It seemed as if she could not believe that he was real.

"Arsinoe," she said in Greek without turning her head, "will the red rub off his lips?"

"Try," replied the Egyptian, and, lifting the flower of destiny from the table, she silently left the room.

Sira took another step forward and another.

Ferhad did not move or speak, but he looked at her with a smile so sweet that Sira forgot she was a Christian. She held out her arms toward him, stepped up to him, and clasped her arms round his neck. Then slowly she raised her lips to his and kissed him.

The red did not rub off. Ferhad was real. But a thrill like fire shot through Sira's heart. She had had many kisses, and royal ones, but never had she known that a kiss could be so sweet.

A delicious shame overcame her. She hid her face on Ferhad's shoulder, and then she felt how he clasped her in his arms and pressed her to him and kissed her on the neck.

She trembled; thrills of fire ran through her, and a strange sweet languor stole over all her senses. She forgot the existence of the King of Persia. She forgot her child. There seemed to her to be no one else left in the world but herself and Ferhad.

In the banqueting hall of the palace, hundreds of lamps hung from the gilded ceiling. The marble columns were twined with roses, and the long table blazed with gold and silver, and glowed with the bright colours of fruit and flowers. And in his chair of state, surrounded by the nobles of his Empire, Chosroes sat like Belshazzar at the feast.

This time there was no warning, no writing on the wall. The King of Persia looked around him, and thought how now he stood on the pinnacle of earthly happiness and glory. And with that thought there came to him another strangely clear and vivid,—the memory of his days of exile. For a moment it hung upon him like a cloud upon the mountain, and seemed to cut him off from everything. But then he put it from him saying in his heart, "Now, all is well."

Oh, Chosroes! you too have been weighed in the balance and found wanting, and your days of exile were

better than those that are to come, and which begin to-night. Then you still had the future, now you have nothing but the past!

The dawn flushed in the East when Sira returned to the palace, and the gardens glittered with dew as if strewn with diamonds.

To Sira, as she looked out through the curtains of her palanquin, the whole world seemed changed. For years pleasure, splendour, and renown had been her portion; but now for the first time in her life she had tasted of happiness!

Sira mounted her outside staircase, and entered her bedroom from the balcony. Here the rose-coloured curtains were shut and the tapers in the alabaster lamps were burnt out. In the dim light she saw her favourite slaves lying asleep on the thick carpet which covered the floor; but she did not wake them. At the end of her room her bed, square canopied, and carved of massive

silver with rose-coloured curtains, stood on a dais. For the first time since she had been Queen of Persia, Sira undressed herself, and slipping between her perfumed sheets, lost herself, but not her sense of delight, in the sweetest sleep she had ever known.

When she awoke the sun was high in heaven. She did not move, but looked around her with a new interest in everything. The walls and ceiling of the room were panelled with rosewood, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which glimmered with rainbow colours. All around the walls were carved and inlaid chests which held her dresses and jewels, and on each side of her bed stood low round tables of ebony inlaid with silver, on which stood all the articles of an Oriental toilet, made in gold and silver and decked with precious stones. It was indeed the chamber of a queen.

For a few moments Sira remained alone, and then her favourite, a Persian girl named Mandane, entered the room

bearing a tray with bread and fruit and wine. She approached the bed, and, finding her mistress awake, arranged her pillows that she might sit up and take her breakfast.

"My lady," she said, "the Lady Arsinoe is waiting till you are ready to see her."

"Let her come to me at once," said Sira, and when the Egyptian appeared, she dismissed the slave, and made Arsinoe sit beside her on the bed.

"Well, Sira," said Arsinoe with her strange smile, "have I done well for you or not?"

"Well," replied Sira, "more than well," and she took Arsinoe's hands and kissed them. "You have given me my heart's desire."

"And what," asked the Egyptian, "will you do for me in return?"

"Whatever you will, if it lies within the power of Sira or of Chosroes."

"Oh," said Arsinoe, "Chosroes is not then quite forgotten. The King of Persia has his uses still?"

Sira blushed. "Tell me, Arsinoe," she said, "what I can do for you?"

"Nothing," replied the Egyptian, "nothing now; but perhaps some day there will be something, and then I will remind you of your promise."

Sira kissed her hands again. "I owe you everything," she said; "and now tell me about Ferhad. Where did you find him, and who is he? Surely a prince of royal blood?"

"Have you found that beauty is a sign of royal blood?"

"Oh, not among the Sassanids," said Sira, "but the founder of their race was a blacksmith; they are not really royal. Ferhad may come from the Pishdanian Kings or from the Princes of Sejestan." The Egyptian laughed. "Four hundred years of royalty are not enough for Sira. No, Ferhad is a slave like yourself. His mother was a dancing girl of Ispahan, and his origin on the other side is as dark as your own."

Sira was silent for a moment, and then asked where the Egyptian had found him.

"I bought him from a learned Dastur," she said "who came to consult me about the study of the stars. He had bought him from his mother when he was a child, and taught him to read and write, and made of him a secretary."

"I thought him too young and beautiful for such dry work, so I brought him to you. His destiny was evident to me without the aid of the stars."

"A slave like myself," said Sira slowly; "well, it is better so, for had he been anything else, you could not have brought him to me. O Arsinoe, I can never repay you, nothing will be enough. You have given me the one thing I asked and longed for. You have made my life complete."

The Egyptian smiled. "Yes," she said, "now you have everything. Yours is a brilliant destiny."

Sira laughed. "Yes," she said, "while it lasts. But now that I have tasted of love and the real joy of life, I will not complain of anything that may come afterwards."

"You are right," said the Egyptian, "one hour of perfect happiness is worth a lifetime in which that hour is wanting." Sira remained lost in thought for a moment or two, and then asked: "When shall I see Ferhad again?"

"Oh," said Arsinoe," it will take all my art to arrange your meetings. This afternoon Chosroes will be with you, and morning is not the time for love; but we must do as we can. You shall see him at my house to-morrow morning."

Then she explained to Sira the arrangements of her household. Her slaves, a dozen or more, were those who had been given her by her royal lover, Hormouz. They were now elderly women; she alone remained young. Her two eunuchs were elderly also, and the only youthful inmate of her house was her page, Ferhad. This indeed was not in accordance with the Oriental custom, though the Persian harem had never been as strict as the Mohammedan became; but Arsinoe was subject to no

rules, and came and went as she liked and might have had a dozen pages instead of one.

Sira wanted to talk about Ferhad, but he had been so short a time with the Egyptian, that there was not much to tell. Arsinoe could only relate that he was very much pleased with the change in his life, and filled with delight at the luxury and splendour of his new surroundings, and that he showed good taste and artistic appreciation of the beautiful in both art and nature.

His duties as a page were merely nominal, and he possessed the true Oriental enjoyment of idleness combined with a rare power of amusing himself.

"Now," concluded the Egyptian, "I have given him, in giving him to you, the one thing he lacked. This morning he came to me, and thanked me again as he has done several times before, for buying him from the Dastur, and told me with much sweetness and grace, that now he was perfectly happy."

Sira clapped her hands in delight and

began to speak, when at that moment, there ran into the room a child, dark, not pretty, but most richly dressed, and decked with jewels, Siroes, the heir of Persia. He ran to Sira, and entwined his arms around her neck and kissed her. He had a passionate nature and a violent temper, and often showed himself haughty, overbearing, and unjust; but he loved his mother.

"How old is Siroes now," asked the Egyptian; "this year that I have been away there are some things that I forget."

"Siroes is nine," said Sira.

"Just half the age of your lover!" said the Egyptian; "but it does not matter. You belong to the Occident, he to the Orient. You are young for your age, and he is old for his; and for that nothing matters when it is destiny."

The next morning Sira had herself dressed in a robe of emerald green with stripes of gold, and decked with pearls and emeralds, and was carried in her

palanquin to the little palace in the garden. Again Arsinoe received her and led her to the Chinese room where again she found Ferhad. The young Persian seemed to her more beautiful, more attractive than before. For the first time in her life she doubted her own beauty, because it seemed to her less than his. This time he came to meet her with his most radiant smile, and Sira threw herself into his arms, and they kissed each other to their hearts' delight.

Sira was an intelligent, and, for her time, a brilliant woman. She wished to talk to her lover, and to know his mind as well as his heart. Ferhad sustained the ordeal very well. He was naturally clever, and had been carefully educated by his old master.

Sira was charmed by his brilliancy as with his evident cultivation, and found him as well versed as herself in Persian literature and poetry. Greek he did not speak, but Sira promised him that she would tell him all that she

knew of the literature and poetry of that glorious language.

His mind seemed to unfold for her like a flower in the sunshine, and Sira gazed at him in an intense delight, thinking him the most perfect creature in the world; her love for him growing more passionate with every moment. Suddenly she remembered what the Egyptian had told her of his delight in luxury and splendour.

"Ferhad," she said, "do you care for jewels?"

"Yes," replied Ferhad, "I love them," and he passed his fingers across the emeralds on her arm. "You have many, many diamonds, emeralds, pearls. You are the favourite of the King."

"And you have none," said Sira.

"No, I have never had one in my life."

Sira quickly took from her third finger an Indian ring, diamonds in green enamel, and slipped it on his little finger. Ferhad's eyes sparkled and he

flushed with pleasure. "Oh, Sira, do you give this to me?"

"Yes," said Sira, "that and everything else that you may desire. The Shah in Shah lays the wealth of his Empire at my feet, and I will share it all with you."

Ferhad thanked her with a kiss. There was no more talk of anything but love, and the time was all too short.

Sira the favourite of Chosroes now led a new and (her conscience remaining silent) perfectly happy life. The Shah in Shah finding her bright with a new brightness, and sweet with a strange new charm, delighted in and loved her more and more. And she sought to please him more than ever; for now she looked to him not for herself alone, but for all she gave Ferhad. Her lover liked jewels and rich garments, and splendid arms (which indeed he never used, since his life was confined within the palace and garden of Arsinoe, but with which he liked to play). And all

these, or the money with which she bought them, came from Chosroes and went to Ferhad.

It was not possible for Sira to see him every day, but she went whenever she could to the little palace where he, who had nothing alse to do, was always waiting for her.

Ferhad was an ideal lover. His disposition was naturally sweet, though not lacking in fire. And his manner was as gentle and tender as the heart of woman could desire. But perhaps what Sira loved in him the most was his dignity, and the pride which made him hold his head as if he wore a crown.

He kissed and caressed her to her heart's delight, but never did he throw himself at her feet or show her anything approaching servile homage. Ferhad knew his own power. He accepted the favourite of Chosroes as no more than his right. For her he was never the slave but always the master.

Their interviews always took place in the yellow salon in which they had

seen each other first; sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon, and, whenever Chosroes gave a banquet, at night.

Sira's devotion to the Egyptian and constant visits to her home created no surprise. Arsinoe had always been her chosen friend, and during the year of her absence in Egypt the favourite had loudly lamented her loss. And in addition to this, Sira had always read and studied, and now it created no astonishment that she was studying, as she gave out, the science of the stars.

Everything went happily; no suspicion clouded the mind of Chosroes, or indeed of any one, and fortune favoured in everything the love of Sira and Ferhad. Days of joy succeeded each other, and the Persian summer with its great heat, its glory of sunlight, and its wealth of roses, passed away like a dream of delight.

In the end of September, just as the nights were growing cooler, was the birthday of Chosroes; and on this day,

in addition to all the fêtes and ceremonies in his own honour, it was always the custom of the great King to make some magnificent present to his favourite. A tender thought to let her share his birthday since, being a slave, she did not know her own! This year his present was a pavilion containing a bath which he had had built for her at some distance from the palace in the Royal Park in the midst of a grove of sweet pines.

Here there was a crystal spring which bubbled up in a natural basin of perhaps fifteen feet in diameter and four or five feet in depth. This basin had been enclosed and paved around with alabaster, and a hexagonal pavilion whose whole interior was of the same precious material had been built over it, a pavilion with no windows in its shining walls, but crowned with a dome of gilded fretwork and rose-coloured glass. Around the walls of this apartment ran a luxuriant divan, rugs were spread on the translucent floor, inlaid tables

and vases of flowers stood carelessly about; and in every panel of the hexagon was a magnificent silver sconce filled with wax lights.

In front of the bath was another room or ante-chamber equally luxurious, and also light from the roof; and the whole building made a splendid and absolutely secluded retreat—an impregnable fortress of love.

Sira was delighted with this new acquisition, and her first thought was to share her delight with Ferhad. This was not so easy, especially since Chosroes, pleased with the new toy, wished to enjoy it himself. But fortune once more showed herself the friend of the lovers. The month of October arrived, and the Shah in Shah, as was his custom, for he dearly loved the chase, set out with a tremendous retinue for a month's hunting in the mountains of Kurdistan.

And now came the time of Sira's perfect happiness, the zenith of her life and love. On the first day of the Shah in Shah's departure, Arsinoe brought

Ferhad to the pavilion in the dress of a female attendant and left him there; and from that time, while the October moon waxed and waned, the existence of the King of Persia was forgotten; and whether in the pavilion, the little palace, or in the sweet pine grove, where now they walked by sun or moon, the lovers spent their days and nights together.

None surprised or even suspected their secret. Perhaps Arsinoe helped with her magic arts to close all curious eyes and ears; but more likely it was only destiny, which sometimes allows us to pluck a rose before she shuts us out of the garden of life forever.

At the end of the month Chosroes returned to Artemita, and the dream of love was over. After a month of absence from his beloved, the King could not bear her for a moment out of his sight. When she went to her pavilion, he accompanied her. Her visits to Arsinoe became impossible, and thus a whole week passed in which she did not see her lover.

Ferhad, whose occupation was gone, wearied himself so in the little palace, that Arsinoe, for the first time, gave him permission to go and amuse himself in the town and bazaars. Unwise indulgence! Ferhad had occasionally enjoyed this privilege in Ispahan, and he knew the pleasures afforded by all towns. He went to the bazaars and to the wine shops where he met other young men. All the veiled women in the streets turned to look at him, and the unveiled ones, the dancing girls, stopped and talked with him, and tried to beguile him with their charms, not knowing that he was the lover of Sira, the favourite of Chosroes. And it all pleased Ferhad and he amused himself very well.

At last Sira was able to see him again in the house of Arsinoe. She threw herself into his arms, and he was enchanted to see her again; but it was not long before she learned that he had found a new interest, for when she asked him what she should give him

after their separation, he replied: "Money to spend in the bazaars."

"But," she said, "do I not give you everything you want?"

"Yes," he said, "but I like to buy things for myself, to have money to spend."

A chill presentiment of evil passed through Sira's heart—the thought that he was going, and wished to go, somewhere where she could not follow. She tried to dissuade him from this new idea; but soon saw it was in vain, and was too clever to persist.

"A young man cannot stay always shut up in a harem like a girl," said Ferhad; "I must go out and see a little of the world outside."

And so the next day Sira brought him money, and from that time he went regularly and made friends with other young men and bought himself things, and sometimes watched the dancing girls, and he brought little presents to Sira, which delighted her more than all the gifts of Chosroes.

They were bought with her own money, indeed, but that was nothing, since he might have spent it all on himself, and instead, he thought of her. His visits to the town never interfered with hers to him; he never kept her waiting, and so she reconciled herself to the idea that a man must have an outside life. The winter passed and it was spring again. The sun grew hot and the nightingales sang in the royal gardens.

The town of Artemita or Dastragerd, for it went by both names, grew hot and dusty, and the wine shops by the river lost their charm. It was not a real city after all; but merely a town which had grown around the royal residence. And Ferhad, having exhausted all its pleasures, tired of it and ceased to visit it at all.

Sira was delighted with this change, and told herself that her lover's desire for an outside life had been only a passing fancy, and that he really cared for nothing but to be with her. We believe so readily what we want to

believe. And Ferhad was glad to be with Sira, for he loved her; but he still longed for an outside life, only not that of Dastragerd, but the life of a great city, such as Modain or Ctesiphon. But as this he could not have, he shut himself, this time voluntarily, within the limits of the little palace and garden, and once more devoted his whole time to love.

The first month, the month of June, was like a dream of Paradise. Ferhad and Sira thought of nothing but each other, and Ferhad consoled himself for the loss of outside amusement with the thought that he occupied a unique position in being the lover of the beloved of the great King of Persia. Only he would have liked that the fact should be known to the world,—sweet impossibility, since his life would have been the price of such renown.

As the summer grew hotter, Ferhad's temper showed itself less sweet. Always imperious, he became now capricious and hard to please. Some-

times he quarrelled with Sira, but the quarrels were but short, for though the fault was always his, Sira never failed to throw herself at his feet and beg his pardon. Whereupon he forgave and restored to his favour her whose only fault toward him was that she loved him too much.

And so the summer passed, and again the hunting season of the King approached. Sira was already revelling in the thought of her month of liberty, when suddenly one day Ferhad told her that he wished to go in the train of Chosroes to Kurdistan.

The shock was terrible. Sira could only weep, and Ferhad was so moved by her grief that he almost lost his desire to go. He took her in his arms and kissed her, and consoled her with such tenderness and told her with so much sweetness, that he only wished to see a little of life that he might be more worthy of her, that she consented that he should go.

It was easily arranged. Arsinoe

recommended him as a young man in whom she was interested to Chosroes, who, carelessly concluding that he was her son, gave him a place among his immediate attendants for the hunting month, since that was all he asked.

With many kisses the young Persian parted from his lady, and started in great delight in the train of the great King, to see the world. But alas for earthly hopes! From the moment in which the eyes of Chosroes first rested upon him, instinct seemed to inspire the Shah in Shah with an intense dislike of this most beautiful youth of his Empire.

The frown of Kings means ruin. Try as Ferhad could and did to please the King, his royal master, nothing availed. Chosroes slighted and found fault with him on every occasion. The general of course followed the royal disfavour, and Ferhad's life became a burden. But all things end, and so the month of hunting ended, and Ferhad was returned to his Egyptian mistress with

the remark that he was too beautiful to be of any use, and the advice to keep him henceforth where he belonged, in the harem.

Arsinoe received him back with pleasure, and Ferhad, who had now learned how well off he had been and who had lost all fancy for the world, embraced her as if she had been indeed his mother, and thanked her once more for all that she had done for him. And then he threw himself into the arms of Sira and told her that he had never known how much he loved her before and that he would never leave her again. Sira felt herself more than repaid for the sacrifice that she had made, and perfect happiness was now restored.

Again it was spring, spring of the year 621, the year before the Hejira.

The war indemnity which Chosroes had claimed from the Romans had never been paid, owing to the impoverished state of the Empire. And now the Shah in Shah received secret informa-

tion that Heraclius was at last amassing the treasure indeed; not for tribute, but for the purpose of making a new war in hopes of winning back his lost provinces and reconstructing the Roman Empire.

Chosroes received the news with strange misgivings. The night before he had had a dream in which he had seen himself crowned and seated on his throne, when suddenly Heraclius strode into his presence, tore the diadem from his brow, and hurled him from the throne.

A presentiment of evil such as he had felt at the banquet two years before overcame him, and in a sudden haste to know the worst, he called for his litter, and had himself carried to the house of the Egyptian, Arsinoe.

His arrival, so sudden and unceremonious, would have struck terror to the heart of any woman less wise; but happily Sira was not there, and as Arsinoe received the King, she saw at once that he had come to her not as an

accuser, but as one who sought her aid. Dismissing all his attendants, he asked her to lead him to her most private apartment, where they could converse undisturbed. And, by the irony of fate, the Egyptian took him to the Chinese apartment, which, for the last two years, had been the scene of the love of Sira and Ferhad.

Here Chosroes told her of his dream and of the news he had received. Arsinoe looked very grave. The stars she said had given her no warning, but they were slow and silent at the best, and she had a quicker means.

Praying the King to excuse her absence for a moment, she left the room, returning presently with her silver serpent in her hand, and followed by Ferhad bearing the flower of destiny, which he placed upon the table and made a low and graceful obeisance to the King. Chosroes looked with a haughty stare at the young man, who, though a slave, wore a costume rich enough for a prince, and glittered with jewels, and

whose beauty was more wonderful than it had been when he first appeared at Artemita.

"Oh," said the King, "my sometime page. Tell me, Arsinoe, is he your son or your lover?"

"Neither, great King," replied the Egyptian.

"Then," said Chosroes, "why do you lavish such wealth upon him?"

"Oh, Shah in Shah," said Arsinoe, with a strange smile, "if you would know my secrets, you must learn to read the stars."

"Nay," said the King, "keep your secrets, but this youth I think, costs you a great deal more than he is worth."

He looked at Ferhad, on whom all other eyes rested with delight, with a mixture of royal insolence, dislike, and scorn.

And Ferhad looked at the King, and longed to tell him that his jewels were the gifts of Sira,—that he held her in his arms and kissed her every day in this very room, and that she had given

him not jewels and kisses only, but that heart which the King thought his. For a moment it almost seemed as if he would speak; but life is sweet and, following a sign from his mistress, he made another obeisance and withdrew.

Then Arsinoe turned to Chosroes, and asked what question he wished to put to the flower of destiny. The King thought for a moment and then said: "I would like to know who is the greatest man who lives, and who will leave the greatest name in history? Is it Chosroes or is it Heraclius?"

Arsinoe spoke some words in a strange language and, touching the flower of destiny with her serpent, it opened, disclosing the great dewdrop in its heart.

"Look," she said, and Chosroes, leaning over the strange plant, looked into the crystal. There he saw a picture of the desert; the deep blue sky bending over the red sand. And under a red rock sat a man in a dress of camel's hair with a face such in beauty and power as the King of Persia had

never seen. His black eyes seemed to the King to look him through and through, and then to pass him by with a gaze which looked beyond "all time into eternity." Chosroes drew back with a sensation that was almost fear, and once more the flower of destiny closed into a bud.

"But," said the King, "I asked for the greatest man. This is neither Heraclius nor myself."

"No," said Arsinoe, "neither the Shah in Shah, nor yet the Emperor, but still the greatest man on earth, Mohammed."

"What!" cried the King, "the mad Arab? Impossible! I had but lately heard that he was forsaken even by his own tribe of the Koresh and driven from Mecca, and that he, with a handful of adherents, was hiding in the desert, hunted like wild beasts."

"True," replied Arsinoe, "this is his darkest hour; but one year more, and all will change, one year more, and Mohammed will be Lord of Arabia."

"And what," said Chosroes slowly, "has this to do with me?"

"Much," replied the sorceress. "Chosroes, King of Persia, you have done much that was great and glorious. You have raised the throne of Sassan to the summit of earthly power. But you have made one mistake which will outweigh all. You have torn the letter of Mohammed, and when word of that was carried back to him the prophet said: 'It is thus that God will tear the kingdom of Persia, and disregard the supplications of Chosroes.'"

Another year passed, and there seemed to be no change in the general conditions of life in the palace of Artemita. Chosroes was still at the height of his glory, and Sira at the height of her beauty, though as far as she knew her age, she was entering her twenty-ninth year. Siroes her son, the heir of Persia, was now twelve years old; a strange child, the disagreeable traits of whose character grew with his age. For the last

three years Sira had neglected him, being absorbed with Ferhad; but the young prince was not allowed to miss her, for there were too many at his father's court anxious to fill her place, and gain the influence that had been hers. And Siroes now learned many lessons which afterwards bore bitter fruit.

Sira was perfectly happy in this year, for now Ferhad seemed to have no other thought but her. The truth was that he had renounced the outside world, because he saw that the animosity of Chosroes barred for him every path to advancement there. He loved Sira, and enjoyed the luxury and ease of his life; and though its monotony and inactivity were not what he desired, he had wisely determined to make the best of what he had. And if ambition was not permitted him, nor independence, surely no one in the history of the East had been more fortunate in love.

History relates that Sira was a Christ-

ian. Had her religion, then, no power with her, or had she, who had both mind and heart, no conscience, that she led this life of deception, without either hesitation or regret? Perhaps neither. Sira was a woman with whom love is a passion that excludes all other thoughts, and to whom regret comes only when love is no more.

And it is doubtful if her religion was more to her than a name. In the harem of the King of Persia, she could have no chapel, and no priest, and not even the comfort of telling her beads, since the rosary was not known, being only borrowed from the Moslems during the Crusades.

She prayed perhaps, but we must remember that she had but little light. The Christianity of the seventh century was a pale and cloudy star, beside the setting sun of the great Persian religion, still beautiful and bright in its decline, or the new moon of the Islam just rising white and glorious in the East.

Thus the third year of the loves of

Ferhad and Sira drew to its close, which always seemed a new beginning, since their year ended in the month of May. And this year was, though they knew it not, one of the great years of time. The year of the Hejira!

With the spring the war between Rome and Persia broke forth again, but this time all was changed, and the world saw with amazement that Chosroes was not invincible, and that once more a hero and a genius was seated on the throne of Constantine.

Heraclius crossed the Black Sea, made his way through the wild mountains of Armenia, and appeared suddenly, flushed with success, in the heart of Persia. The Persians, who with the Avars had threatened Constantinople itself, were recalled to the defence of their own country. Chosroes himself, struck with an unexplainable aversion to trust to the fortunes of a battle, retreated with forty thousand men, leaving to Heraclius the fruits of almost bloodless victory, and shut

himself up once more in Artemita, while the Romans encamped for the winter at their ease in the heart of his Empire.

And while all this was going on, Mohammed, with a few followers, had slipped through the hands of his enemies and reached Medina, where he was received and established as temporal sovereign and Prophet of God. His flight inaugurated a new era of time.

Chosroes returned to Artemita in a black mood, which even the smiles of Sira could not charm away. Sira, more radiant than ever, with the joy of days and weeks spent alone with her lover. It was the ninth of November. Cold winds swept down from the mountains; the sunlight paled, and in the royal gardens the nightingales were silent, and the roses all dead.

The heart of Chosroes was very heavy. Many times a day he said to himself: "The mad Arab is Prince of Medina

and Heraclius sits in the plains of Mogan, and has put out the sacred fires in the temples of Ormia."

He remembered with strange distinctness, how he had torn the letter of Mohammed, and day and night the words of the prophecy rang in his ears: "It is thus that God will tear the kingdom of Persia, and disregard the supplications of Chosroes."

One dreary rainy day, when the palace of Artemita seemed cold and dark, and the very jewels, which encrusted the walls of his cabinet, ceased to glitter, Chosroes had sent for Arsinoe, the Egyptian, and sat amid dim splendours,, and surrounded by a score of his highest officers, in silence awaiting her coming. At length the portière which closed the only entrance to the room was lifted; but instead of the Egyptian, there appeared a young man whose beauty seemed to shed a light around him, and whose many jewels glittered as the royal ones did not. He appeared a vision of sudden bright-

ness like a rising star at twilight. It was Ferhad.

In his hand he held a small roll of parchment which, walking forward and making a low obeisance, he presented to the King. Chosroes looked at him with a black frown, took the roll, and opening it, read:

"Oh, Shah in Shah, command not my presence to-day. The stars are unpropitious, and I can bring you nothing but bad news.

"ARSINOE."

At this, the King of Persia fell into an unaccountable rage, that rage which seeks a victim.

"Slave," he said to Ferhad, "how dare you bring me such an answer?"

"Shah in Shah," replied Ferhad with perfect dignity, "the answer is not mine."

"What," cried Chosroes, with that injustice which he sometimes showed, "you presume to bandy words with the

King of Persia? I will teach you that a slave should be silent in the presence of his Master." And drawing a dagger from his belt, he struck Ferhad with the heavy jewelled hilt across his face.

The young Persian started back, turning pale with a rage quite equal to the King's. His hand sought his own dagger, and for an instant it seemed as if he would return the insult he had received with death. But then he remembered everything, and falling on his knees, he touched the carpet with his forehead, and rising, walked backwards with perfect calmness out of the royal cabinet.

His self-control was perfect, but once outside and out of hearing, he stretched forth his right hand, and called down upon the King of Persia, the great Mazda Yacna curse. Nor did this curse so dreaded by the Persians, content the wounded pride and honour of Ferhad. He returned to Arsinoe, and, reproaching her bitterly for having sent him on such an errand, related

his wrongs with a passion such as he had never shown before and which fairly surprised the Egyptian.

Arsinoe told him to have patience, to say nothing to Sira, and showed him that his only hope of satisfaction was to await the course of destiny. And Ferhad took her advice, but the blow given him by the King of Persia, though its marks soon left his face, had left a scar in his heart and given him a new motive in life: Revenge.

We have already lingered too long over the love of Ferhad and Sira; but alas, the joys of love and life are so rare that one turns from them with regret, even when they are forbidden fruit. And the recollection (if indeed it ever leaves us) returns always too soon, that "the wages of sin is death."

Another winter passed, in which the palace of Artemita seemed to sleep, and Ferhad and Sira were the only ones who lived; and another summer, in which Heraclius was everywhere vic-

torious. In vain Chosroes recalled his forces from the Bosphorus and the Nile. Nothing could stem the tide of Roman conquest, and the Persians were obliged to retreat before the invaders, as before the rising waves of a resistless sea. Chosroes had torn the letter of Mohammed, and God was tearing the kingdom of Persia.

All this time Ferhad nursed his revenge and rejoiced in the misfortune of Chosroes; but more than this, he had a plan. He still loved the favourite of the King of Persia, and spent with her all the time that she could give, and made her perfectly happy, with no thought that there remained a future. But he had determined to live for himself. For this end he had engaged a master to teach him riding and the use of arms; and when he could absent himself from the palace without the knowledge of Sira or Arsinoe, he practised with a new passion the arts of war.

Another winter came and went, and

the return of spring ushered in a third campaign. Chosroes himself set out at the head of his army to meet Heraclius. Ferhad and Sira remained behind. Sira's five years of love and happiness had made her strong and confident. She looked for no reverse. It made no difference to her which conquered, Rome or Persia; but she loved the war because it left her alone with Ferhad. Once more, as years before, they retired to the pavilion in the pine grove, and lived in a dream of love, which was to be their last.

Bad news came from the seat of war. Heraclius traversed in seven days the mountains of Kurdistan, and crossed the Tigris and then the Euphrates. The Persians retreated before him, and made their last stand on the banks of the Sarus, a rapid river, three hundred feet in breadth, whose single bridge was strongly fortified. The flowers of May bloomed in the gardens of Artemita, and the nightingales sang in the pines. And one day the news was brought to

Sira that the Romans had stormed the bridge and crossed the river.

Ferhad left her for an hour or two to learn the news; and during his absence Sira sent and begged Arsinoe to bring her the flower of destiny. The flower was brought and placed on a little table in the room which contained the pool; but Arsinoe sent word that she could not come until evening, and Sira sat and looked in vain at the purple bud, which remained closed and impenetrable.

At length Ferhad returned. He had heard all, and his resolution was taken. He went to Sira, and took her in his arms and kissed her with his wonted tenderness, and she clasped her arms about his neck, and clung to him as a vine clings to a palm.

And then he said to her: "Sira, the time has come when I must leave you, I have loved you, and I love you still; but when I came here I was a boy, and now I am a man. I have given you my best and most beautiful years;

but Sira, I have my own life to live."

Sira drew back and looked at him surprised, but not believing him in earnest.

"What life, would you live without me. You who are my life?"

"I will be a soldier," replied Ferhad.

"A soldier," repeated Sira, "to fight for Chosroes?"

"No," cried Ferhad, his long silent passion bursting into flame, "for Heraclius."

"Against the King of Persia! The man who has denied me all chance of advancement, who has insulted me and struck me in the face!"

"No," exclaimed Sira, horror-stricken "surely not that!"

"Yes," said Ferhad, "but now my hour has come. I go to join the army of Heraclius, where at last I may be a man."

"And for that," said Sira, "you would leave me!"

"I must," replied Ferhad, and again

he took her in his arms and kissed her, and tried to make her listen to what he thought reason. But Sira could not listen. She tried first to persuade him from his purpose, then at least to wait. In vain; Ferhad was firm, he grew impatient. She reproached him, upbraided him with his ingratitude. Then once more, sought to move his pity, reminding him of all their love and all their happy days. But still in vain. She appealed to him in the words all women use who try to hold their lovers when they are no longer to be held. In her despair, seeing all her efforts useless, she called upon Christ and His Mother to help her,—Christ and His Mother, whom she had forgotten for so long.

But no divine assistance came to her. Heaven was silent. Ferhad grew angry. He replied to her; but not in words of love. He showed himself selfish, cruel, and unmindful of the past. He had had the love of Sira, Sira the most beautiful and brilliant woman of

the Persian Empire; that love which Chosroes, the Shah in Shah had to win. And now that he wanted it no longer, he flung it aside as lightly as though it were the fancy of a dancing girl. He had had the love, the jewels, the money, and now he wanted something else instead.

In a last access of despair, she clung to him as if force could hold him where persuasion failed. But Ferhad was tired of the scene, and with a sudden brutality he unclasped her arms, and flung her from him with such violence that she staggered back against the table on which stood the flower of destiny, and overturned it on the floor. The jade vase fell with a crash and splintered into fragments, and the purple flower opening of itself, threw forth the magic crystal which broke into a thousand dewdrops and fell sparkling on the alabaster pavement like a shower of tears.

They both stood and looked in horror at the ruin. Ferhad, in superstitious

dread, and Sira with the sudden memory that when she had looked into the crystal she had seen all her life before the image of Ferhad, and *nothing afterwards*. And she knew that this was the end of everything.

"Ferhad," she said, with the calmness of despair, "I have loved you too much."

It was the truth, and perhaps for that reason Ferhad was moved to momentary pity. Once more he came to her, and took her in his arms, and kissed her, for the last time. Then, feeling that if he lingered, his resolution would be shaken, he tore himself from her and walked, without another look, towards the door.

Sira took one step after him. "Ferhad," she said, "oh, do not leave me Ferhad! Ferhad!"

But he did not answer. The portière dropped behind him, and Sira fell with outstretched arms face downwards on the pavement among the tears of destiny.

Hours passed. The sun set, and the

spring night came down as softly as a bridal veil. One by one the stars came out in the deep blue and the nightingales sang in the pines, but there was no moon. Sira still lay where she had fallen, her face pressed against the alabaster pavement. She was not dead or even unconscious, but her heart was broken. Midnight drew near, and at last the silence was stirred by a footstep which crossed the ante-chamber. The portière was lifted, and a woman entered, holding a lamp above her head. It was Arsinoe.

The light fell upon Sira, and upon the broken flower of destiny, the green splinters of jade and the tears which still sparkled, each one round and perfect on the shining alabaster.

Arsinoe drew back in horror. "Sira," she cried, "what has happened, what means all this?"

Sira raised herself slowly on one elbow. "Ferhad has left me," she said.

There was a silence, and then she

went on, "I have loved him too much. If he was angry with me or out of humour, it was I who begged his forgiveness. I lived only to please him. I threw myself at his feet. I gave him jewels, money, everything that his heart desired. For him I was untrue to Chosroes. For him I forgot my child, and now, now, Arsinoe, you know everything. Did you know that it would end like this?"

"Yes," replied Arsinoe, "but you told me Sira that if you could taste of love and happiness, you would not complain of anything that might come afterwards. You have had your heart's desire, and it has lasted five years. Sira, I have lived long, and I know that woman is not born for happiness. You have had more than your share."

Sira raised herself to a sitting posture, and looked in silence at the Egyptian. "Arsinoe," she said at last, "must I live? Is there anything more in life for me?"

"Yes," replied the Egyptian, "I

came to tell you that Chosroes has returned with the remnant of his army. Heraclius is close behind him, and he cannot stay at Artemita."

"Chosroes at Artemita, and he has not sent for me."

"No, he has shut himself in his cabinet, and sits there alone."

Sira remained silent for a few moments, a struggle going on in her heart, as between life and death. Then she rose pale as the moonless night but fixed in her resolution.

"I will go to him," she said.

"I will go with you," replied Arsinoe, and they left the pavilion together.

Chosroes sat alone in his cabinet, whose walls gleamed with gold and jewels. Midnight was past, and the lamps flickered and burned pale, but the great King thought not of sleep.

The darkest hour was come. The strange flower which had held the fortunes of the house of Sassan lay shattered in the pavilion among the pines, and Mohammed was avenged. The

portière was lifted, and two women entered, Arsinoe and Sira. The latter went to him, and laid her hand upon his shoulder, and only then the Shah in Shah looked up.

"Why have you come to me?" he asked, "all is lost. God has torn the kingdom of Persia. Chosroes sits to-night in Artemita; Heraclius will sit here to-morrow."

"I have come," answered Sira, "to go with you once more into exile!" [1]

[1] See Appendix I.

The Last of the Fatimites

THE LAST OF THE FATIMITES

IT was early spring in the land of Egypt in the year 1171. The Nile was low, the air soft and sweet, and in the history of the country there was that hush, which is the prelude of great events, a dimness and uncertainty like that of the dawn which follows the night and precedes the rising sun.

Egypt had once more been conquered. This time by the great Turkish Sultan (of his dynasty the first and last) Noureddin the Just. The Franks had been driven from the country and were making a last feeble and wavering stand in their kingdom of Jerusalem, which was soon to return to the sceptre of its natural Lord, the Turk.

The blood and treasure spent in the First Crusades had been shed and wasted all in vain. In a few years more the

last Frank would be driven from Palestine, and only through the pity and magnanimity of the Sultan, would the pilgrims continue to visit the Holy Sepulchre, which, since the Christians had proved themselves unworthy to be its guardians, it would please God to give back to Islam.

In Egypt the last Fatimite Khalif, Adhed, had expired in his palace in Cairo, silently and unheeded by the world, as he had lived. The green livery of the house of Ali was changed for the black of the Abbassides; the Khalif Mosthadi of Bagdad was acknowledged as the true commander of the faithful, and the Emir Shiracouh governed Egypt in the name of Nou reddin, unconsciously, awaiting the hero, who was to succeed them both, and to unite under his sceptre the realms of Egypt, Arabia, Syria, and Palestine.

The Emir Ali Amr governor of Upper Egypt from the first to the second cataract and related to the Fatimites, through the female line, had remained

(being a powerful favourite with the Egyptians themselves, and to that perhaps owing the Sultan's grace) in his position under the beginning of Turkish rule. At the death of the Khalif he had been summoned to Cairo, but so far from any evil awaiting him there, he had been received with open arms by Shiracouh, confirmed in his office, and was now returning, loaded with presents and assurances of friendship, to the seat of his government at Assouan.

For several days he had been looked for, and the Princess Rikaiya, his wife, had sat in the latticed bow of her western window, watching for the first glimpse of his boat upon the Nile. The Princess Rikaiya was the daughter of the Sultan of Yemen. A little more than three years ago, the Emir Ali Amr had been sent to that country as the Khalif's Ambassador, and had brought her back, then a girl of thirteen, as his bride.

Ali Amr himself, in the flower of youth, though perhaps ten years older than his

wife, had attained that early eminence so common in the East, where nothing is beyond the hope and fire of youth; handsome in his person and royal in his bearing as in his birth, the Arab Princess had given him from the first not her hand only but her heart.

He had loved her also with all the passion of his race for she was beautiful with that dark noble beauty of the pure Arab blood. The long black eyes, red pomegranate lips, the high-bred features, and the wealth of jet black hair, slender and graceful and thoroughbred, she needed no diadem to prove herself a princess.

No children had been given them, but this was less felt by the Emir, since he had by a former wife, who had given her life for his, a son now six years old; and the marriage was as ideally happy as any which the Oriental poets have sung.

The Princess Rikaiya sat watching in her window, robed in rich garments, bright hued and embroidered in gold

and glittering with jewels, diamonds, rubies, and pearls. She was hourly expecting her husband, and would meet him once more like a bride. At her feet sat her two favourite slaves, two Arab girls, whom she had brought with her from Yemen, and who were her constant companions; Amina and Fatima. Amina held a lute and Fatima a tambourine; but both were silent, for the Princess did not listen to their music, but only gazed out of the window and down the river.

The room in which they sat was gayly painted and gilded in arabesques; five enamelled glass lanterns hung from the ceiling by gilded chains, and the usual Oriental furniture of rugs and cushions was supplemented by an inlaid table and two low chairs of Greek workmanship.

Suddenly the Princess uttered a cry, and, forgetting everything else in the excitement of the moment, she threw open the lattice and leaned out.

"A sail! A sail! The Emir's boat!" The setting sun glanced on the diamonds

of her tiara, kissed her rose-hued cheek, and warmed the whiteness of her bosom, and the crimson of her vest. But for a moment; then she closed her lattice remembering herself a Princess, and sat still to wait her Lord's return.

The time passed slowly, and ere the noise and bustle in the courtyard announced the return of the Emir, evening had fallen and the lamps were lit. Then the Princess rose and, followed by her attendants, passed into the first salon of the harem to meet her husband.

Nor had she long to wait; the portière was lifted and preceded by half a dozen eunuchs, all jet black and in the richest attire, the Emir Ali Amr once more entered the sanctuary of his home. With a rustling of soft garments and a silence of bare feet, the other women slaves had crowded into the room, and as the Fatimite Prince crossed the threshold, tall and handsome, the royal aigrette glittering in his turban and the jewelled sword hanging by his side, they all fell upon their knees and saluted

him by touching their foreheads to the ground.

But his wife Rikaiya, the daughter of a Sultan, stood erect, looked at him for one moment in silence, her soul in her eyes, and then threw herself into his arms. The Emir pressed her to his heart and kissed her with a rapture which seemed to equal hers and, then releasing her said with a wave of his hand towards the eunuchs, who bore varied boxes and caskets, "Princess, I lay at your feet the treasures given me by Shiracouh."

Rikaiya looked on one side and the other, and saw for the first time behind her husband two female figures. One a negress gaudy with shells and beads and silver trinkets over her dark Egyptian dress, and the other still covered with a veil which she was beginning to unwind.

"Who are these?" she asked.

"Slaves," replied the Emir, "given me by Shiracouh." And in spite of herself, the Princess fancied a tone that

was strange in his voice. At that moment, the new slave unwound herself and her veil fell off and left her hair uncovered in the full light of the lamps. The Princess gazed at her in wonder; never before had she seen a creature of her like. Reared in Arabia and from there transported to the Nile, she knew only the black eyes and black locks of the Orient; and now she saw hair like spun gold that glittered and rippled and fell in a bright disorder like the cataract itself. She beheld a skin so white that beside it her own cream tint seemed dark, cheeks like twin roses, and eyes not black or brown like all other eyes, but blue, blue as the sea.

Jealousy was a sentiment unknown to Rikaiya; she had had no rival. "My Lord!" she exclaimed, "you have brought home a peri!"

The Emir smiled. "No," he said, "only a woman; but from that country whence the Turks have learned to cull the flowers, Circassia! Tchagane, Salute the Princess Rikaiya!"

The slave came forward, knelt before her new mistress, and kissed her hand. Rikaiya's eyes were bent in wonder on her golden hair, when suddenly the slave looked up. Their eyes met, and the Princess recoiled in something that was almost terror. All the devils of Eblis laughed in Tchagane's smile!

Perhaps the Emir had noticed his wife's expression, for his brow contracted in a frown. Turning to the chief of his eunuchs, he bade him take charge of the new slaves, and then gave his hand to the Princess to lead her into the inner apartments.

Rikaiya looked at him and smiled, a smile of perfect happiness; the slave's look was already forgotten in the joy of her husband's return. But Tchagane started forward, her arms folded on her breast, and boldly addressed the Emir. "Does my Lord not need me to pour his sherbet?"

"No," replied Ali Amr, "not to-night." And turning from her without another glance he led Rikaiya through

the long row of apartments, followed by Amina and Fatima.

Tchagane looked after them for a moment, and then turning to the chief eunuch, "and I, where am I to lodge, since the Emir does not need me to-night?"

"With the other slaves," replied Hassan, whom her manner did not please, "and have a care that you are not too forward, or I will teach you that silence and obedience are the most important virtues for a slave." Tchagane's eyes flashed fire; but she remembered that she was a slave, and said nothing more. The other women crowded around her, and examined her attire, fingered her trinkets and her hair, and rubbed her cheeks and forehead to find out if the pink and white came off. Tchagane supported the ordeal with apparent patience, and at length even their Oriental curiosity was satisfied, and they led her gaily off to supper.

That evening the Emir remained alone with his wife. The slaves were

not called to dance or sing; and after Amina and Fatima had served the supper, they also were dismissed and rejoined the others.

The next day Ali Amr held his divan, and all the cases for justice which had arisen in his absence were brought before him. Oriental deliberations and decisions are naturally slow, and the sun was sinking behind the mountains of the Libyan desert when he re-entered his harem.

Again Rikaiya came to meet him followed by all her slaves, the Circassian this time among the rest. And again the Emir retired with her into the inner apartments, and they were served and attended again by Amina and Fatima only. But after supper an hour or so, Hassan was called, and brought back the Emir's command for the slaves to array themselves and sing and dance.

Hastily all were prepared, and the slaves, some thirty in number, all in their brightest raiment of gold-

embroidered jackets, spangled turbans, and trousers of bright-hued brocade, and loaded with necklaces, bracelets and earrings of gold and silver, coral and amber, entered the great salon of the harem.

This apartment was high and vaulted, and painted entirely, walls and ceiling, in arabesques on a green ground. A row of gilded columns ran around three sides of it supporting a narrow gallery, and the fourth side was raised three steps and spread with Persian rugs, thus forming a divan. And here, leaning against piles of embroidered cushions, sat the Emir and the Princess under a canopy of crimson and gold.

The eunuchs with lutes, tambourines, and bottle drums, mounted to the gallery and began playing an Arabic air, such as was heard in Mecca ere the birth of Mohammed, and is still heard wherever the music of Arabia is known, monotonous and tinged with melancholy, but wild and sweet. The slaves ranged themselves in rows, un-

wound their scarfs, clicked their castinets and the dance began.

The ceiling of the apartment was too high for hanging lamps, but to every column was fixed a silver sconce filled with wax candles, which cast a soft and brilliant light upon the scene.

The women were all natives of Africa, Egyptians, Nubians, and Abyssinians. All had black eyes and hair; but their complexions varied from the cream and roses of the Delta to the bronze and copper of Nubia and the mountains of the moon. Their beauty varied, but all were pleasing, and none lacked that grace which is the immemorial gift of the daughters of the Nile. And as they danced together, with their glitter of spangles and their glory of crimson and purple and pink, they seemed like a bed of tropical flowers swayed by the wind.

Amina and Fatima did not dance with the others; but sat on the steps of the divan. Only the two new inmates of the harem were missing, and

suddenly the Princess turning to Hassan asked: "Where are the negress and the Circassian?"

Hassan hurried out of the room to seek them; but when he re-entered with the "gifts of Shiracouh," the dance was ended, and the women leaned against the columns to rest while Amina and Fatima danced alone. The negress, who carried a lute, came forward and seated herself on the floor against a column; but Tchagane remained standing under the gallery, and one could only see that she was muffled in a long dark shawl.

The Princess loved to see her favourites dance, her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkled as she looked at them. The land of the Nile had put forth all its charms and graces in the dance of the other slaves; but the dance of Fatima and Amina showed the greater and more subtle grace and charm or her own Arabia.

Tchagane looked at the Princess, beautiful and noble as she sat there

beside her husband, proud and happy, glittering with jewels, the daughter of a Sultan and the wife of an Emir.

Very different had been her lot in life; born and bred in wild freedom among the mountains of Circassia. Torn from her home at the age of twelve, the troublous times had granted her no resting place. She had been sold in the markets of Smyrna, Damascus, Broussa, and Cairo, and already at the age of eighteen she was the slave of her seventh master. She had been loved and cast aside, and loved again. Each year a change of scene and a new lover from the Black Sea to the Nile. She had known both blows and kisses. But in this strange life, her beauty and her wit had both grown brighter, and she had learned many things which made her able to hold her own. She was sure of herself, and as she looked at the Princess she smiled.

The Arab girls stopped dancing; Hassan beckoned to Tchagane, and, advancing to the middle of the hall,

she threw aside her shawl and stood revealed in a costume as strange to the Nile as she was herself.

Contrary to Oriental custom, her shoulders and arms were bare and dazzling as alabaster. A garment like an old Greek tunic of black gauze shot with silver threads veiled, but did not hide, the whiteness of her skin and a Damascus shawl of pink, striped with gold, was draped around her hips and fell to her ankles. Her feet were bare but she wore golden anklets, and broad gold bracelets were clasped high up her arms. A purple velvet cap embroidered in pearls replaced the Oriental turban, and her golden hair was bound with strings of pearls.

The musicians in the gallery were silent, but the negress with the lute began to play a wild Circassian air, and Tchagane began to dance. Not the still swaying, dance of the Orient, in which the feet have the least play of all, but a real dance, full of life and motion. A dance of tossing arms and whirling

feet such as one finds to-day in the Caucasus and along the shores of the Black Sea. The other slaves looked on in wonder; the Princess bent forward with interest and surprise in her velvet eyes; the Emir remained motionless and silent, but his eyes were riveted upon Tchagane with an expression which no other dancer had ever called forth.

Wilder and more exciting grew the melody, and quicker and more full of fire the dance. Tchagane threw herself from one posture into another with the wild grace of a creature untamed. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes shone like stars, and she seemed to abandon herself heart and soul to the passion of the dance.

Suddenly the Princess turned her eyes from the dancer to her husband, and at his look, her heart was filled with a new and unknown fear. Ali Amr did not even see her; his eyes were fixed upon Tchagane, and he had forgotten everything else. The Princess sank back among her cushions, and the

negress drawing her thumb across the strings, ended the tune with a wild crash of notes, and Tchagane stood still.

Silence reigned in the hall. The slaves waited for their mistress to applaud, but she did not. All were surprised, but none dared move or speak.

Tchagane herself took the initiative, first making a low obeisance to the Emir and his wife, she then, with unheard of effrontery, threw her shawl around her, and quitted the apartment without either asking permission or being dismissed.

"Turkish insolence," said the Princess, "and a Turkish dance. I had heard that the Turks were barbarians, though they profess our faith. Their slaves are like themselves."

Ali Amr did not even answer, but like a man under a spell he rose and left the hall by the door by which Tchagane had made her exit. The Circassian was waiting for him in the corridor, and with a cry of joy she threw herself into his arms. The Emir clasped her to his

heart and kissed her. "Tchagane," he said, "how have I lived without you even for a day. It shall not be again."

The Princess, taking no notice of the Emir's sudden departure, called two Nubian girls to dance. Then two Egyptians took their places. Then Amina and Fatima would have danced again, but Rikaiya bid them not, and rising from the divan retired to her own apartments.

The favourites followed her and the others waited for a while the return of the Emir. But in vain; he did not come, and Hassan at length put out the lights, and the harem was given over to silence and sleep.

The next day the Emir spent again in the divan, supped with the Princess, and retired to the Salamlik immediately afterwards, saying that he had letters to dictate to his secretary. But the letters were never written, for Hassan, not the secretary, was summoned and received the order to bring Tchagane to the Emir and also a flacon of that

sherbet which the Emir had brought back from Cairo in the little casks which had come from Greece.

Tchagane and the sherbet were brought, and later a second flacon was called for, and the negress with her lute was summoned that Tchagane might dance, this time for the Emir alone. But Ali Amr reappeared in his harem that night no more.

A week passed, and every day was like the other. The Emir appeared in the harem at noon, and partook of the mid-day meal with the Princess, his wife, played for a few moments with the little Abdul, his son, and then withdrew, returning again for supper and then bidding the Princess good-night. Business was always the pretext for his absence. Rikaiya knew it was a pretext only, but she was too proud to reproach him with his deceit, or even to let him know that she understood. That deceit in itself was a tribute to her. An Oriental is the master of his own house, and if a slave touches his

fancy the indulgence of that fancy is his undisputed right. But it was a tribute which Rikaiya did not value, her nature was too noble to stoop to deceit of any kind, and she would rather he had told her the truth.

She was too proud to show either to her husband or to her slaves what she thought or felt, but this self-repression only caused her to suffer more. She *had been* so happy. Her husband had been everything to her and she to him. He had thought of no other woman, looked at none but her. He had said that he would take no other wife, and she had never thought that she would be deserted for a slave. What power was it? What charm that this woman possessed? Was it her golden hair that had caught him in its meshes, or was it the art with which she danced, or was it her devil's smile?

Only at night when she was alone Rikaiya gave way to her feelings and then indeed she wept. At first Amina and Fatima dared not speak to her,

but after three or four days they began to talk, and though her pride would not let her answer, she listened to them. The whole harem was against the newcomer they said, the "Turkish devil" as they called her, for they knew nothing of Circassia and her name was strange and barbarous in their ears. She had bewitched their master, they were all sure of that, and they all knew besides that the sherbet, which she alone knew how to pour for him, was no sherbet, but Greek wine, which she had taught him to drink; the "Turkish devil!"

Sometimes Rikaiya wondered if her husband's passion, for she could call it nothing less, for the Circassian, would last? And if it did not, she asked herself, would he return to her and love her as he had done before, and could she forget? Could her love for him be the same, and could she ever be happy as she had been again?

Every morning when she looked first from her window and saw the deep perfect blue of the sky, the majestic

sand mountains glittering in the sunshine, gold and silver, purple and pink, and the Nile gliding between the palm groves and the fields green as a pavement of emerald, another long, bright emerald clasped in its embrace, the island of Elephantine, her heart was filled with hope.

But as the day wore through its long bright dulness, that hope declined. When the Emir came to sup with her she was silent and depressed and could not feign a gayety she did not feel, and when each time he rose and bade her a good-night, hope died in her heart like a light blown out. Then she would have her Arab girls bring their lutes and sing their sad wild Arab airs, which filled her eyes with tears, and she would say to herself: "My good days are gone, and will not return. I will never be happy again; he loves me and will love me no more."

At noon on the eighth day when the Emir entered his wife's apartment, he seemed animated by some new and happy

idea. The Princess asked no questions, but the secret was soon revealed.

"To-night," said the Emir, "is the full moon, and being now somewhat at leisure, I have thought that we would go and sup at the island of Philæ." The Princess assented to the plan with something like a flush of hope. Often before had they made picnics to the beautiful island, and many had been the happy hours which she had spent in the Temple of Isis.

Preparations for the party were completed as hastily as anything can be done in the Orient, and in the cool of the afternoon, the little caravan set out from the palace, ambling first through the bazaars of Assouan, and then riding up the right bank of the Nile. First rode the Emir, mounted on an Arabian mare of the purest breed and surrounded by his Lieutenant and a dozen soldiers of his guard; and then came the Princess Rikaiya with Amina and Fatima. There followed Tchagane, the negress, and four other slaves, all

riding asses and muffled from head to foot in black mantles and veils, undistinguishable one from the other. And last of all rode Hassan and two other eunuchs, who with two pack mules brought up the rear.

The river was so low that they rode along on the hard dry mud quickly and easily; past the emerald fields of grain, the palm groves, the mud villages enclosed in their mud walls; the sakyias and shadoufs now useless and high in the air, and the quarries of Syene, where it seems that the workmen have only stopped to rest and where one obelisk lies cut and ready for shipping down the Nile.

Past all this they rode, without a thought of those who had once ruled in Egypt and worked these quarries and found out these water wheels, some of whom slept in hidden tombs in the mountains on the western shore, and had done great things in their time, but now were dead and forgotten.

Just before sunset they reached the

spot where the boats waited for them,—long flat boats each with a dozen rowers, who, slowly and skilfully guarding against the currents, rowed them across to the island of Philæ—Philæ! the most beautiful spot in Egypt and one of the most beautiful in all the world.

In the twelfth century the Temple of Isis was almost as perfect as in the days of the Ptolemies. Graceful clusters of palms were grouped around it, and instead of the matted thorn bushes and heaps of stones and rows of broken walls which encumber it now, the island was then a garden full of luxuriant plants and flowers tended with all the care and skill of the Persian gardeners of the Emir.

Ah, that we might have seen it then! Even now, half ruined as it is, the island turned a wilderness around it, the Temple of Isis, though less imposing than those of Edfou and Denderah, is still the most beautiful and most poetic temple of the Nile.

The party climbed up a rough stair-

case cut in the rock and arrived in the spacious outer court-yard of the Temple, then surrounded by a majestic colonnade, only half of which now remains. Here the Lieutenant and the soldiers saluted the Emir and withdrew, and the Temple became a harem. The Princess and her slaves unwound their veils and reappeared in all the brightness of their attire, and the eunuchs carrying the various baskets and jars went into the inner court-yard to prepare the supper.

Ali Amr seated himself on the pedestal of a broken column, and Tchagane, with that boldness which was her wont, followed him and threw herself down in the clover at his feet. Rikaiya turning away from them went to the western side of the inclosure and seated herself on the low wall which still remains today, and Amina and Fatima came with their lutes and sat, as always, at her feet.

From this wall one has the most glorious view in Egypt. Here the mountains form a magnificent and savage gorge through which the Nile rushes,

divided by a mass of rocks into two wild and foaming streams, growing wilder and whiter as they descend, till from the distance one hears the thunder of the cataract.

Rikaiya knew the place well, but she had seen it only in happy hours, and it inspired different thoughts in her to-day. Long she gazed down the river, and the grandeur and the wildness of the scene appealed to her as they had never done before. For the first time she felt the passion in the heart of nature, and it seemed to her that this great and wonderful heart beat in sympathy with her own.

Then she looked at the Temple and wondered who had built it, and who had been the goddess who had been worshipped there. They were idolaters she knew, and as such to be abhorred. Her own people also had worshipped idols before Mohammed's time, but they had built no temples, raised no shrines like that of Philæ to their gods.

For the first time she thought with interest of these long forgotten people.

Surely if they could make things so beautiful, and which so long outlived even their memory, there must have been something in them and their religion which should have been remembered. Was it all really lost—their history, their arts, the writing on their walls, which none could read—and lost for ever? Perhaps all people came and went and had their day and were forgotten? Even now it seemed that her own glorious race was passing; soon they would be no more than vassals to the Turk—the Turk who came from nowhere, like the wind, and, like the wind, went where he would, and conquered all things.

Or could it be that nothing in this world was really lost, but things were only hidden for a time, and that some day perhaps a race of men as yet unborn would come, to whom the wisdom of Egypt would be revealed, and who could read the writing on the walls, and would give back its arts, its secrets, its religion to the world?

These thoughts were interrupted by a slave who came to tell the Princess that the supper was ready in the court-yard of the Temple. Rikaiya looked towards her husband, and slowly, in answer to her look, the Emir rose and came towards her, gave her his hand and led her through the gateway of the Temple into the inner court-yard.

Here in the square pillared court, whose beauty is still fresh to-day is something which no other Temple offers, a tenderness, a sweetness, which makes one feel at home, like a memory or a perfume. Perhaps it is the lingering presence of the goddess who was both wife and mother, as well as Queen of Heaven and Earth.

Cushions and rugs were arranged on the stone incline which leads into the Temple, and here Ali and Rikaiya placed themselves; a low table was spread in front of them, and the slaves and eunuchs stood around ready to serve.

The meal was slow like all Oriental meals, and so silent that the Princess

bade her Arab girls fetch their lutes and sing. They did her bidding, and at their sad sweet Arab airs, tears glittered in Rikaiya's eyes, and the silence of her heart and of the Temple were filled.

The air grew dark with the sudden darkness of Egypt. The sun had set, the after-glow had flushed and faded, and now, above the eastern pylon of the Temple, appeared the symbol of her who once dwelt there. Mohammed, the Virgin Mary, Diana, have all claimed the crescent, but the full moon is the orb of Isis still.

Slowly it rose, round, perfect, glittering like a burnished silver shield. The darkness vanished, and the sky changed to a soft turquoise blue. The mountains glittered like heaps of shining ore, the Nile reflected the blue of the sky, and all the world was changed to blue and silver.

The Emir and the Princess mounted to the roof of the Temple, the better to observe the beauty of the night, and the

slaves were left in the court-yard to enjoy their supper. It was the first time for eight days that they had been alone. Rikaiya looked at her husband as if she expected and hoped for something, but the Emir did not even meet her glance.

Then she spoke, timidly, praising the beauty of the night, and venturing to remind him of the many happy hours which they had spent at Philæ. Her tone and manner were no longer those of the proud daughter of the Sultan of Yemen, but the Emir did not even seem to notice the change. His answers showed that his thoughts were elsewhere. He was restless and impatient, and Rikaiya, seeing that her effort had failed, remained silent and forced herself to be calm, though ten thousand daggers turned in her heart. Presently a light laugh was heard, a figure sprang through the opening of the staircase, and Tchagane ran towards them and stood still in front of the Emir.

"These are Turkish manners doubt-

less," said the Princess, "that a slave comes uncalled."

"Most gracious Lady," replied Tchagane, "a slave should know her master's wishes before they are expressed."

The Emir rose and offered his hand to his wife. "Let us go to Pharaoh's bed," he said; "I have ordered Hassan to prepare for us there, and there I will drink my sherbet and Tchagane shall dance."

Rikaiya rose and descended the stairs without a word, Tchagane following.

In the court-yard the slaves, who were all sitting on the ground, sprang up hastily, taking their lutes and fans. And the eunuchs the forbidden flasks of wine. The whole party proceeded to that exquisite little building outside the Temple, still known as Pharaoh's bed. In those days the stone roof remained, and Hassan had spread the floor with rugs, arranged a pile of cushions and a table at one end, and hung between the pillars lanterns of coloured glass. It was as

habitable, and perhaps more so, than it had been in the time of the Ptolemies.

The Emir and the Princess seated themselves, the slaves and the eunuchs grouped themselves at the other end of the apartment, for Pharaoh's bed contains but a single room. The negress squatting on the floor began her strange melody, and Tchagane her still stranger dance. Rikaiya had seen the dance but once before, and then had found no pleasure in it; now it was only with an effort that she sat through it again. Her eyes indeed were not on the dancer, but on her husband, and she saw, with death in her heart, how his cheeks flushed, and with what passionate delight his eyes hung on the Circassian; how he forgot everything else in her, and how she intoxicated all his senses.

When the dance was done, he called Tchagane to him and bade her fetch his sherbet. Never before had he drunk the forbidden liquor in the presence of his wife; she had heard, but she had not seen. Tchagane took a gold and

enamelled goblet which stood on the table. Hassan handed her a flask, and, holding the latter high in the air, she poured a stream of ruby liquid which filled the goblet to the brim, and then, half kneeling, handed it to the Emir.

Then Rikaiya rose, "My Lord," "wine is forbidden by the Prophet."

The Emir frowned and his black eyes flashed fire.

"This is not wine," Tchagane interposed with her accustomed insolence, "it is but sherbet."

"Lying," said Rikaiya, "is the natural vice of slaves; the Emir will not say it is not wine."

"No," replied Ali Amr slowly, "it is wine," and raising the goblet to his lips, he drained it at a single draught.

"Another cup, Tchagane."

Rikaiya did not look at him again, but calling Amina and Fatima to her, she passed out of Pharaoh's bed into the moonlight. Hassan followed them, and silently all four walked through the palm grove down to the water's edge.

There for a little while they sat, but Rikaiya could find no rest, and soon they wandered back among the palms. Here they met the other slaves and eunuchs whom the Emir had dismissed, that he might be alone with the Circassian.

Rikaiya took no notice of them, but continued her way through the moonlit gardens, till suddenly, without knowing where she went, she found herself once more in front of Pharaoh's bed. A sudden desire seized her to see her husband and his favourite alone,—a something which she could neither explain nor control. Motioning her attendants to withdraw to a little distance, she advanced alone, and, stepping upon the threshold, stood in the shadow of the portal, looking in upon the illuminated apartment, herself unseen.

The Emir still leaned at his ease among the cushions, and his flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes showed that his blood was hot with love and wine. Tchagane, holding the goblet in her

hand, went to refill it from the flasks, which stood upon the ledge between two pillars. Her back was turned to the Emir, her face full towards the entrance, and Rikaiya marked well how she raised the flacon and poured out the wine.

"Would my Lord like a drop of attar of roses in this cup?" she asked, looking over her shoulder at the Emir. "Here is my Lady Rikaiya's own bottle. It will give a sweetness to the wine."

"Yes," said the Emir, "let me taste it; anything from your hand will be sweet!"

Tchagane set down the goblet, lifted the enamelled flacon and then, with her left hand, raising over it a jewelled medallion which hung upon her breast, shook from it a white powder into the perfume. Then, quickly pouring a few drops of attar into the wine, she carried the goblet back to the Emir.

For a second Rikaiya's heart stood still, then her one thought was for her husband; springing through the doorway,

she ran to him and cried: "Do not drink, my Lord; the wine is poisoned."

"Yes," said the Emir, "with the sweet poison of love, which it pleases me to drink," and though she sought to snatch the goblet from him, he pushed her back with his left hand, and raising it to his lips, drained the liquor at a draught.

"Ah, Tchagane, you are right," he said: "the attar adds not only sweetness to the wine, but fire!"

His eyes flashed, his cheeks flushed a deeper red, and turning to his wife he said: "Princess, the one poison that I fear is jealousy. Oh! how the wine glows in my veins!—it thrills—it burns, it—God and his Prophet! what is this?" Suddenly he turned pale, the veins stood out on his forehead, and his eyes glared like a wild beast's at bay. Springing to his feet, he looked from one to the other of the women, and the fierce question came from his trembling lips, "Which of you has done this?"

And in their faces he read his answer:

in Rikaiya's, love and terror and despair; in Tchagane's, only the mocking smile of a devil who has done her worst.

"Rikaiya!" he cried; "Rikaiya, forgive me; she is a Jinn, she has bewitched me, but as Allah hears me I love you and you alone."

The Emir swayed and tottered on his feet; Rikaiya caught him in her arms and held him for a moment in an embrace that seemed as if it might hold him back from death itself. Then his limbs gave way under him, his weight overcame her, and they both fell among the cushions,—Ali Amr still in Rikaiya's arms and—dead.

Tchagane stood and looked at them a moment, then rushing to the doorway screamed for help—help where there was no more. Hassan, Amina, and Fatima were in a moment on the scene, and soon the other slaves and eunuchs, running from all directions, filled the apartment. Hassan had lifted the Emir and torn his carftan open while Rikaiya felt his heart. Amina brought a jar

of water, and Fatima a flask of wine. They fanned him, rubbed his temples all in vain—never more would Ali feel the air stirred by peacocks' feathers—never more would he drink either water or wine. His heart was still.

"What had happened?" the slaves asked each other, but no one answered.

Tchagane had slipped unobserved from the building, and Rikaiya sat among the cushions silent and motionless, as if turned to stone, still holding her husband in her arms.

Presently the sound of hurrying feet was heard outside. Tchagane wrapped in a veil reappeared, and the Lieutenant of the Emir would have followed, with half a dozen soldiers at his heels, had not Hassan stopped him at the door and warned him against invading the sacredness of the harem.

The Lieutenant, a native Egyptian, a rarity in this much conquered country, whose name was Yousef, and who bore the Turkish title of Bey, stopped, but not for long. "If his master were

dead," he said, "it became his duty to enquire into his death, and to take command of affairs, including, though with all reverence, the harem."

He therefore demanded entrance and speech of the Princess as soon as the women had had time to veil themselves. And Hassan, seeing resistance useless, sent the other eunuchs to the Temple in search of the mantles and veils, and Rikaiya and her slaves were soon ready to receive their unwonted visitors.

Yousef Bey then entered Pharaoh's bed, accompanied by half a dozen guards, saluted the widow of his Lord, and then proceeded to examine the body of the Emir, which had been laid on a pile of cushions, in the centre of the room. Assured at once that his master was dead, the Lieutenant turned to the Princess, and asked her if she considered that the Emir had met a natural death.

"No," replied Rikaiya, "he was poisoned by a slave whom he brought back

with him from Cairo—I saw her mix the poison in his wine."

"And you did not stop her——"

"I could not," said Rikaiya, with difficulty suppressing her pride and indignation at being thus questioned by an inferior.

"I begged the Emir not to drink, but he would not listen."

"How did she give him the poison?" asked Yousef.

"In attar of roses, which she added to the wine——"

"And which I took from my Lady's own flask," cried Tchagane, rushing forward. "Yousef Bey, I call God and his Prophet to witness that I am innocent. I loved my master and he loved me. I was his favourite. My Lady was jealous and took this means to revenge herself and to destroy us both."

There was an instant's silence. Rikaiya recoiled a step in horror—horror doubled by the fact that she read in all the faces round her the impression made by Tchagane's words.

"Woman," said Yousef slowly to Tchagane, "you speak boldly, but do you know what you are saying? You have accused the Princess Rikaiya, daughter of the Sultan of Yemen, of the murder of her husband, Ali Amr—Emir! Think well before you repeat the charge."

"I repeat it," cried Tchagane, "and God is my witness! Who can believe that I would harm my master? I am a slave, who lived but in his favour, and losing him to me means losing everything. My Lady was jealous; she thought her power over my Lord was gone. She poisoned her flacon, knowing that I would mingle the attar with his wine and that the crime could be fastened on me. Take this flacon; try it for yourself; give it to some dumb beast to taste, and see if death comes not to it as quickly as to the Emir."

"Give me the flacon," said Yousef in a low stern voice, "and the cup out of which the Emir drank."

Both were handed to him by the slaves; he smelled them both and found in each the same perfume. Then turning to Rikaiya he said, "Princess, is this your flacon?"

"Yes," replied Rikaiya, "and it is poisoned with some strange poison, doubtless of the Greeks. I saw this woman drop it from the medallion which she wears upon her breast. Take it from her, examine it, and you will see that the charge which she has dared to make against me is as false and base as she herself."

"Give me the medallion," said the Lieutenant, and without a moment's hesitation Tchagane unfastened it and handed it to him.

Yousef turned the medallion over in his hand, a costly trinket of Greek workmanship, set with bright coloured stones.

"Princess," he said, "is this the one?"

"Yes," said Rikaiya.

Yousef turned and twisted the medallion, and his expression changed; finally he threw it on the stone floor, and picked

it up again and then—at last he spoke. "This could hold no poison. It does not open—it is solid gold."

"God has proved my innocence!" cried Tchagane, and, starting forward, she managed, as if by accident, to drop her veil and stood, as if unconscious of the fact, before the lieutenant and his guards in all her beauty. The other women screamed in terror, but Tchagane stood unmoved. What was it indeed to her to be thus looked upon?—she who had been sold in half the markets of the Turkish Empire.

Yousef Bey was young, and lacked none of the fire of his race. He looked at Tchagane as if he could never turn his eyes away. Her eyes met his, and from that moment the tongues of angels might have borne witness against her in vain. On his other side stood Rikaiya, shrouded in her veil; her eyes were fixed on Yousef, and she saw that in the contest between them (whose very existence she held as an insult to herself) he had taken the part of the slave.

"Yousef Bey," she said, "I see that you have decided against me. The word of a Princess seems of less value than that of a slave. But you are not my judge. My husband, the Emir, was governor of Upper Egypt; only by the will of the Sultan can his place be filled, and there is therefore none here to whom I can appeal. I will go to Cairo. You and this woman will accompany me with what attendants I shall choose, and I will lay my cause before the Emir Shiracouh."

Rikaiya was a Princess, and therefore due to all consideration and respect. Yousef had been her Lord's Lieutenant, and he reflected that the authority which he had gained so suddenly might not be his for long, and that discretion was the better part.

"Princess," he said, "I accept your proposition. My brother Achmet shall fill my place as Captain of the Guard. We will bury my late Lord, Ali Amr, to-morrow, and the next day we will start for Cairo."

"It is well," replied Rikaiya; "Hassan will conduct our preparations, and do you, command two boats for our journey and another lodging for the Circassian till then in Assouan. She does not cross the threshold of my palace nor enter my presence again."

Yousef bowed in silence, and so far from disputing the will of the Princess, his heart was filled with joy, for he promised himself to lodge Tchagane nowhere but in his own house.

The body of the Emir was then lifted upon a rug, and so carried by the guards out of Pharaoh's bed and through the moonlit gardens, the train of women and eunuchs following a sad and silent procession (very different from the one which had arrived on the island only a few hours before) back to the Nile.

It was after midnight when the party again reached Assouan. Yousef Bey had commanded silence, not wishing at that hour to rouse the sleeping town with the news of the Emir's death. Rikaiya and her slaves entered the

harem, and the body of the Emir was disposed in the audience hall of the palace in charge of the eunuchs and guards.

Then Yousef led Tchagane and her negress to his own home. His harem, which included his mother and four slaves, for he was not yet married, were all asleep, and not deeming it best to wake them, he retained the Circassian and her attendant in the rooms of the Salamlik.

Tchagane did not oppose the will of this new master to whom chance had given her. Yousef was young and pleased her as well as another. She had changed hands too often not to understand her destiny, and she knew and loved her power. The sun rose on the day of Ali Amr's funeral to find his Lieutenant as much the slave of the Circassian as the Emir had been the day before.

Rikaiya remained shut up in the innermost apartment of the harem, attended only by Amina and Fatima, and refusing

to speak to anyone else except Hassan. Alone with her devoted slaves she gave way entirely to grief, but she felt that even before the rest of the household she could no longer appear as she had always done, for she knew not how many of them might be against her, how many might believe the horrible accusation which had been cast upon her, and when she went among them again she knew that she must wear a mask.

The funeral of the Emir took place late in the afternoon, and was celebrated with all the pomp which could be so hastily arranged. The little Abdul walked in the procession between Hassan and Yousef Bey. The coffin was covered with gold brocade and India shawls. The eunuchs and pages threw cakes and silver money in the air as they passed along the narrow streets, and almost the entire population of Assouan followed the cortège and saw the Emir laid in his last resting-place in the desert sand.

The next day two boats with broad

brown sails and twenty oars apiece left Assouan for Cairo. On the first was Yousef Bey with Tchagane and her negress, one eunuch and a dozen of the guards. On the second, Rikaiya with the little Abdul, now last of his race, his nurse, Amina, Fatima, Hassan, and two other eunuchs and another dozen of the guards.

It was now the month of April, and the Nile was very low, but the wind was favourable, blowing always from the south and though the boats stopped at sunset, and lay all night moored to the banks, three weeks' time brought this strangely assorted party on their still stranger errand to the capital. It was the first night of May and a half moon shone in the deep blue sky when the boats were finally moored to the landing-place, and the long silent journey ended in the shadow of the minarets and domes of Cairo.

The next morning Yousef went ashore and sought an audience of the Governor. All things move slowly in the East, and

it was evening before he returned with a litter and a train of donkeys with large red saddles; and orders to bring the Princess and her suite to the palace. Rikaiya seated herself in the litter, her attendants mounted the donkeys, and the cavalcade, setting off at a good speed, traversed the city and arrived at the splendid and mysterious palace of the Fatimite Kaliphs, now the residence of the Turkish Governor.

Here Yousef was obliged to part from Tchagane and that without a word or look, but not without hope, for he intended to beg her as a gift from the Emir. The Circassian once more passed into the train of the Princess, and the women and the eunuchs and the little prince Abdul were introduced into the palace by a side entrance which led to the harem.

Rikaiya was the daughter of a Sultan, but the palace of Yemen and that of Assouan were both simple as compared to this, on which had been lavished for three centuries the treasures of Egypt,

the richest country of the world. Led by one of the viceregal eunuchs, the party advanced through room after room, connected by folding doors, in which were collected the wonders and splendours of the Orient, a dream of the Arabian Nights: walls of translucent alabaster or rich Damascus tiles, or mosaics of semi-precious stones, doors and shutters, chests and tables of inlaid woods, often incrusted with gold, silver, and jewels, enamelled lamps hanging by gold and silver chains. There were wonderful carpets, softening the tread on marble floors, curtains, divans, and cushions of the richest silks and satins interwoven with silver and gold. Everywhere were spread soft and brilliant colours, gold and jewels, rich and precious things; everything which, through the senses, could delight the heart.

Finally they reached the apartments which had been allotted for their use, and Rikaiya and her attendants established themselves as comfortably as possible.

A troup of black-eyed girls, who not so long ago had been the slaves of Khalif Adhed, fluttered in to offer their help, if help were needed, and much more to gratify their curiosity, but no woman of higher rank, if indeed there were any such, appeared. The silver lamps were lighted, rose water and perfumes were brought to the Princess, and presently an elaborate supper was served.

Rikaiya, who during her whole voyage had been plunged in grief, began to feel that new interest in life which comes with any pleasant change. The novelty and splendour of the Palace of the Khalifs, after the discomforts and monotony of the voyage, seemed to her like morning after night, and her heart was filled once more with hope. Human nature and youth do not change, and though a widow and the victim of a false accusation, Rikaiya was but seventeen.

The other slaves and eunuchs had withdrawn; Amina and Fatima only were with her sitting at her feet, and beginning to tune their lutes. The

Princess leant among a pile of cushions, unconsciously the most beautiful thing in this beautiful apartment, and robed in the very costume of crimson and gold which she had worn one month before, on the return of her husband to Assouan.

Suddenly the portière in front of her was lifted. A eunuch, evidently the Kisslar Aga of the palace, entered and, stepping respectfully aside, gave place to a young man, who, with all the ease of one who knows himself the master of the situation, walked to the middle of the room and stood still before the Princess. Rikaiya was so startled by this apparition that she forgot that she was unveiled, and returned the newcomer's gaze with interest equal to his own.

The young man was of medium height, slender and graceful, dark and pale. His features were fine and clearly cut; he was smooth shaven, and his ears, hands, and feet were most beautiful. Instead of a turban he wore the round

astrachan cap of the Kurds, which showed his hair in closely curling blue-black waves, and his eyes were grey with long black lashes, and as bright as stars. His whole expression was sensitive and almost sad, but full of genius and fire,—a being in whom the body was second to the soul.

He wore a caftan of black satin shot with silver and fastened with a silver girdle round his waist. In the girdle stuck a jewelled dagger and on his left hand he wore a signet ring.

The charm of his presence was so great that Rikaiya could hardly turn her eyes away from him, but finally recollecting how unwarrantable was the appearance in her apartment of a man, she spoke, but to the eunuch.

"Who is this person," she asked, "who against all the rules of Islam enters my presence without giving me even time to veil myself?"

"Princess," replied the eunuch with an air of conscious pride, "this is the Governor of Egypt."

"This," cried Rikaiya, rising to her feet, "the Governor of Egypt! Surely the Emir Shiracouh is not so young."

"Princess," said the young man, speaking for himself, "the Emir Shiracouh is dead; I am his nephew Saladdin."[1]

His voice, which was soft and sweet, played on Rikaiya's ears like music. They looked at each other again in silence. It was one of those moments when time seems to hold its breath—this first meeting of the Arab Princess and the Kurdish soldier, who was soon to be the Sultan of the Turks.

The eunuch, anxious, as is usual with his kind, to talk, narrated that Saladdin Emir, though young (he was at this time twenty-two), had been chosen by the Sultan to succeed his uncle because of his wisdom, which he possessed beyond his years, and for the valour which had made him the hero of every battle in which he had taken part.

[1] Saleh-ed-din.

Saladdin bid the eunuch hold his peace, but his words had pleased Rikaiya. She was glad to think that those lips which smiled so radiantly could direct in council also, and that hand could wield the scimiter as well as wear the signet. He was the Governor of Egypt, and she bethought herself that it was to him that she must plead her cause.

"Saladdin Emir" she said, "I have come to you in search of justice. My husband, Ali Emir, is dead. He was poisoned."

Saladdin smiled. "By a Circassian slave," he said, "whom my uncle gave him, and to whom he entrusted the performance of the deed."

Rikaiya shrank back with mingled horror and relief; the secret was revealed and she was cleared.

"So it was all a plot," she said. "The Emir Shiracouh pretended to be my husband's friend, and sent him home with honours, presents, and his assassin. Surely it would have been more

honourable and less cruel to us both had he taken his life openly here."

Her eyes flashed and her cheeks flushed crimson; the whole force and passion of her nature were aroused by the treachery of Shiracouh.

"Princess," replied Saladdin, "Ali Amr was a favourite with the people, a Fatimite. His death was considered necessary, and Shiracouh thought best that it should seem an accident. My uncle was the servant of the Sultan, and did what he considered his duty to his master. No assassin should strike a blow for me, or through me, for the Sultan or the Khalif. But, neither will I judge the dead."

"Saladdin Emir," said Rikaiya, "your words are just. Shiracouh is dead, and you have not to answer for his deed. But was it his intention to include me in his vengeance, by making me my husband's murderess? Of which I am accused."

"No, Princess," replied Saladdin. "The slave accused you of the crime

perhaps to save herself, perhaps from jealousy, or for some other reason. God alone knows the female heart. But, since the accusation has been made, I tell you this which otherwise should not be told. I am the Governor of Egypt. My first duty is to the Sultan, my first regard for the memory of Shiracouh! But I am resolved to maintain justice and to defend the innocent, and it shall not be said that Saladdin allowed the daughter of a Sultan to suffer under a false and unjust charge."

Rikaiya looked at him a moment more in silence, and there were tears in her velvet eyes. One noble nature understands another, and she knew the sacrifice which Saladdin made for her, and the danger which he ran in thus revealing a state secret for her sake.

"Saladdin Emir," she said, "you are more than good to me and I thank you with all my heart."

Saladdin flushed with pleasure, and a smile like summer lightning played around his lips.

"Princess," he said, "an act of justice needs no thanks."

A sudden rustling was heard behind them, the portière was hastily parted, and, with her usual audacity, Tchagane ran into the room and, falling on her knees beside Saladdin, would have taken and kissed his hand. But he drew back and regarded her with an imperious frown.

"The assassin," he said, "of Ali Amr Emir!"

Tchagane looked at him with all her witchery, that witchery which had never failed her yet.

"Saladdin Effendi Emir," she replied, "I am a slave and did the bidding of my master."

"Yes," he said, "but the bidding was not mine, and you did more,—you accused an innocent woman, a Princess, of the crime."

"Emir, life is sweet even to a slave. My Lady Rikaiya had seen me drop the poison in the Emir's wine. She accused me of the murder, and I accused her in return, to save myself."

Tchagane was a judge of human nature. Her boldness and the truth of what she said, unhappy as it was, pleased Saladdin, but she herself did not. For him her beauty and her witchery had no power. He knew and could not forget what she was. For the first time in her life Tchagane had failed.

"Princess," said the Emir, turning to Rikaiya again, "you have heard the woman's words, and she tells the truth. She has been the instrument—I will not say of justice but of destiny. But through her you have lost your husband and your home, and have suffered under a false and terrible accusation. It is for you to fix her punishment!"

Rikaiya looked at her enemy, at the woman who had robbed her of her husband's love, of her happy life, her palace at Assouan, of all that she held most dear,—the woman who, though but a slave, had triumphed over her, a Princess, on every occasion when there had been a contest between the two. Now at last her hour had come. All that she had

suffered passed through her mind and involuntarily, as though to still the pain of remembrance, she pressed her hands across her heart.

Tchagane did not look at her, but remained kneeling, her eyes fixed on Saladdin, incredulous that he could really resist her. It was the same look that Rikaiya knew too well, which she had seen her fix, not only on Ali Amr but on Yousef,—the look with which Tchagane regarded all men.

For a moment an overwhelming rage possessed the heart of the Princess, a desire to stab the Circassian to the heart with her own hand. In another moment, she thought, Saladdin would melt as the others had done, would recall his words to her, turn from her as even her husband had done, and take the "Turkish devil" to his heart. And then she looked at him, the young Governor of Egypt. His eyes were indeed fixed upon Tchagane, but not with love, only with a disdainful curiosity, and then as if she wearied him too far, he spoke.

"Woman," he said, "spare your sweet looks and smiles, keep them till the next time when you stand for sale in the market. Such as you have no power to charm Saladdin."

And as the lightning comes and goes, Rikaiya's rage vanished, leaving no trace behind. Tchagane's death could not have repaid her for all that she had suffered at her hands, but—Saladdin had avenged her.

"Emir," she said, "this woman has indeed caused me to suffer everything of which the human heart is capable, but she, it seems, was but the instrument in the hands of others; and were it not so, still it were beneath my dignity to take revenge upon a slave. I only ask that I may never have to see her again."

"Princess," exclaimed Saladdin, looking at Rikaiya with that look which "the others" had given to Tchagane, "woman is beautiful, tender, and sweet by nature and the will of God. I have wondered if she could be great and noble also, or if those qualities were vouchsafed,

alone of all her sex, to Kadjah, Mother of the believers. Rikaiya, I have found them in you. You are a Princess not by birth alone."

Rikaiya flushed with pleasure, more, with joy. She had loved her husband but—he had not been like Saladdin.

And now the nature of the slave showed itself at last without its mask. Without a word of thanks for Rikaiya's pardon, she threw herself on her face at Saladdin's feet, and wept and sobbed as if seeking in a last fit of desperation to gain by tears what she had failed to win by smiles.

"Mahmoud," said Saladdin, speaking to the eunuch, "remove this woman to the most distant part of the harem, and see that never again does she offend the Princess Rikaiya with her presence. To-morrow she must be sent away, but where? She is a firebrand who will bring trouble everywhere, and I will not make any true believer subject to such a curse."

"Emir Effendi" said the eunuch, "you

might send her as a present to the Shah of Persia in return for the arms and saddles and the great carpet which he sent to the Emir Shiracouh."

"No," said Saladdin, "the Shah is a Shia, but still a Moslem. I will send her," and again he smiled the lightning smile, "to the young Emperor of Constantinople. It may be the will of Allah that she shall hasten the downfall of the Comnennian dynasty."

At these words which inspired her with a new hope, Tchagane rose. Saladdin's manner had led her to dread the worst fate which can befall a slave, to be given to some poor man and condemned to a life of poverty and drudgery, from which there would be no escape. Even a mediocre house like that of Yousef was not to her taste, though the Lieutenant himself has amused her for a while. Though born a peasant and become a slave, her life had been lived in palaces, and splendour and luxury were as necessary to her as to a Princess of the blood. Saladdin's words

"The young Emperor" and "Constantinople" opened a new field to her ambition, and her vague ideas of the liberty of women among the Christians promised her more than she could hope for in the Orient.

For a moment she stood in silence looking from Saladdin to Rikaiya, an insolent defiance in her eyes. Then as Mahmoud took her by the arm to lead her away, she made a low and mocking reverence, as if taking her leave of the life of the Orient, and disappeared behind the green and gold portière forever.

Rikaiya looked at Saladdin with an unutterable gratitude in her beautiful eyes. "Emir," she said with some reluctance, as if she had rather leave the thing in doubt, "you have decided the fate of this woman; will you tell me what is to be mine? My own country is far away, and I have no longer a home at Assouan."

"Princess," said Saladdin, asking a question in his turn, "how long has Ali Amr been dead?"

"Three weeks yesterday," replied Rikaiya.

"Strange!" exclaimed Saladdin; "he died then on the same day as my Uncle Shiracouh. On the same day our forty days of mourning will be accomplished, and we will talk of the future. And until then, Princess, you will honour me with your presence and consider this palace, which is mine by the favour of the Sultan, as your own."

"I thank you, Emir," replied Rikaiya, and she might have said more, but to her infinite surprise Saladdin took her hand and pressed it to his lips, and then withdrew.

Once left alone Rikaiya retired to rest, but it was not till late in the night that her excitement permitted her to sleep. Her interview with Saladdin had been one of the greatest and most unusual events of her life. Reared like all Oriental women of rank in the strictest seclusion, she had known no men but her father, brothers, and husband. Her ideas of the rest of mankind had been

limited to glimpses of them through the harem lattices; and Yousef had been the first one outside of her immediate family with whom she had ever spoken, and that through her veil and only from necessity.

And now she had received the visit of a young man and had conversed with him, and he had seen her unveiled; all as she had heard these things were done among the Giaours. And yet she could not feel herself to blame. The law of Islam indeed forbids her all intercourse with men not of her kindred, but another law, as strong, made a Moslem the master of his own house, and gave him the right to see and speak with any woman who happened to be an inmate of his harem, and, since this law applied to all, no one could dream of denying to the Governor of Egypt the freedom of his own palace.

And she had come here of her own free will to seek for justice, and not knowing what would be her fate. Justice she had found, but her destiny was

known only to God. She was a Princess, but she knew how much respect was paid among the Turks to royal blood. Shiracouh, she knew, had been a soldier of fortune, and his nephew could be no more. She did not discriminate among the Turks and Kurds, but believed that they were all adventurers who relied not on blue blood or high descent, but only on their swords.

And then her thoughts returned to her husband, whom she had for the first time forgotten. Ali Amr had been a prince of purest Arab blood, of the tribe of the Koresh, the family of El Hashim, and more than all a Fatimite, and a descendant of the Prophet. He had been tall and handsome, noble in his manner and in his bearing. She had loved him for three years and mourned him now, three weeks. He had been untrue to her and deserted her for a slave, but he had repented and died in her arms. She had forgiven him and, though dead, she loved him still, and would love him always. He had been a Prince in every-

thing. But—to-night she had seen Saladdin.

The next day mourning garments were brought to Rikaiya, such as there had been no time to procure in Assouan, garments not too dismally dark, but relieved with silver like Saladdin's own, so that they seemed less like widow's weeds than merely as if she had, like Egypt itself, exchanged the green of the Fatimites for the black of the Abassids.

All day long she and the little Abdul and their attendants were amused by eunuchs and slaves. They were shown all the apartments of the harem, the wonderful gardens, and finally through the outer lattices, the narrow crowded streets of Cairo. After a childhood spent at Yemen and three years at Assouan, it was like another world.

In the evening Saladdin repeated his visit, but this time, instead of standing as he had done before, he seated himself beside Rikaiya, on the green and gold divan, conversed with her on various subjects, and remained for more than an

hour. Fatima and Amina were present sitting silent on the floor, but they were never asked to touch their lutes, nor were any other slaves summoned to sing or dance. Saladdin and Rikaiya needed no amusements.

The third evening the Princess looked for his visit with an impatience which she did not seek to explain to herself. Nor did he keep her waiting, but came sooner and stayed longer than the evening before. The fourth and fifth, the sixth and seventh evenings were all alike, and yet each one was longer and more sweet. Rikaiya wore the mourning garments, but the silver which glittered through their blackness found its reflection in her heart.

She had mourned three weeks for Ali Amr, and might have mourned him always, but the charm of Saladdin was too great! That charm (which never failed to conquer even his enemies), here in this green and gold apartment, by the light of silver lamps, and the sweet scent of incense, made him irresistible. Gradu-

ally the image of the Fatimite Prince, which she had thought to keep always in her heart, was replaced by that of the Kurdish soldier. On the seventh night, the moon was full again, and Ali Amr's infidelity had cost him more than life alone: he was not dead only, but forgotten.

The time passed on and the forty days of mourning ran out. On the forty-first, Rikaiya laid her black robes aside, and there were brought to her, in a box of sandalwood, two costumes, the richest that oriental fancy could devise. One, lilac embroidered in gold; and the other, rose thickly sown with pearls. Rikaiya attired herself in the lilac robe and decked herself with all her jewels, and when at the usual hour Saladdin entered her apartment, the splendour of her beauty was like the rising sun.

Saladdin, too, had laid aside his mourning, but his taste was always for the sombre. A caftan of deep blue and silver replaced the black one, and the only real change was an aigrette of

diamonds which sparkled in his cap. Rikaiya rose to meet him at his entrance, and for the second time he took her hand and pressed it to his lips.

"Princess," he said, "the days of mourning are accomplished."

"Yes," replied Rikaiya, "and I have to thank you, Saladdin Emir, for all your kindness and hospitality."

"Nay, Princess," said Saladdin, "it is you who have honoured this palace with your presence. You are the daughter of a Sultan and the widow of a Prince. There are none here who equal or approach your rank."

"Birth is the gift of God, Emir," replied the Princess, "and therefore to be prized, but there are other gifts greater than royal blood."

At these words Saladdin flushed with pleasure. "Princess," he said, "I need not tell you that the Prophet has forbidden a young woman to remain a widow after the time he has fixed, the forty days of mourning for the dead."

He paused, but his eyes rested on

Rikaiya, and told her all that he could have said. Love needs no words.

"Rikaiya," he said at last, "will you go back to Yemen, or will you stay with me?"

Love takes courage from a man and gives it to a woman. Rikaiya looked at him and answered, "I will stay with you, Saladdin Emir."

The silence was broken, the reserve of days and weeks melted like mist before the rising sun. The Kurdish soldier took the Arab Princess in his arms, and rank and race, and the whole world besides, were forgotten in their first kiss.

On the third day the nuptials of Saladdin and Rikaiya were celebrated with all the splendour of the Orient. The streets of Cairo were hung with coloured lanterns and in the blue Egyptian sky shone the New Moon . . . the New Moon, which, like the Phœnix, and the Soul, rises immortal from its own extinction.

The full orb had marked the end of Rikaiya's first life and love, and now the

crescent lit her to new hope and happiness. ALLAH ILLAH ALLAH, MOHAMMED ER RAZUL ALLAH!

The history of Saladdin is too well known to need repetition. Gifted with genius and valour, which made him the hero of his time, his rise to power was as sudden and brilliant as that of the meteor which flashes into life from nowhere and illuminates the whole heavens with its light.

Rikaiya had given her hand and heart to a soldier of fortune. A few years later she found herself the consort of the first sovereign of the age—Saladdin, the all-powerful Sultan of the Turks; Saladdin whose fame so long outlives him that, after the lapse of seven centuries, he is still a bright star in history![1]

[1] See Appendix II.

The New Moon of Islam

THE NEW MOON OF ISLAM

I

THE setting sun trailed his long golden rays over the green Bulgarian hills, and the evening breeze brought with it the scent of blossoms and the perfume of the yellow locust, the sweetness of the Balkan spring. Nature had made beautiful the scene and the hour, but man has spoiled her work. The storks had left their happy feeding grounds and already the vultures came screaming in their place, and their feast was ready, for far and near, among blood-stained grass and trampled flowers, lay the corpses of horses and men.

It was the evening of the battle of Varna, the 29th of May 1444, a day memorable in the history of the Hungarians and the Turks. The war be-

tween these two nations had been ended, and the great and ever-victorious Murad had agreed to a treaty of peace, when he might have pursued his conquests into the heart of Hungary; for it has been truly said by his enemies as well as his friends, that Murad II. never made war except in a just cause, and sheathed his sword in the moment of victory.

Secure in the belief that peace was established, Murad withdrew his victorious army to Magnesia, leaving only the necessary garrisons of his Balkan fortresses behind. But hardly was his back turned when evil and ambitious councillors surrounded the young King of Hungary, French adventurers eager for the spoils of war, the dark and wily Cardinal Julian, and the brave and ambitious John Hunyadi, whose later greatness has caused his share in the treachery to be almost forgotten.

"Now," they said, "Murad is gone to Magnesia, and with him his army. His Balkan provinces are at our mercy, let us invade them, and we will make them

ours. Ladislaus shall be King of Bulgaria and Servia as well as of Hungary!"

Murad had never broken a treaty or his word. Truth was indeed the undeniable merit and custom of the Turks, which since the beginning of their history, when Disabul had sent word to Justinian that the Turks could neither utter nor forgive a lie, had not changed.

But the Christians had often broken theirs, and the plea so often used was urged again, that it was not necessary to keep faith with infidels. The councils were specious and tempting; Ladislaus was young and hot blooded; he listened and fell. With a gallant and glittering army, he crossed the Danube and pursued his way unhindered down through the Servian and Bulgarian valleys almost to the Black Sea; almost, but the news had followed and overtaken Murad before he reached Magnesia. He turned back and met Ladislaus at Varna, carrying on a lance in the front of his army "the broken treaty."

The surprise of the Hungarians and

French served only to increase their courage, and they threw themselves on their enemies with such irresistible force that their cavalry, at the head of which rode Ladislaus himself, cut their way into the heart of the Turkish army. The Irregulars were scattered like chaff before the wind. The Janissaries[1] themselves gave way, and for a moment all seemed lost. Then Murad, thinking always of the broken treaty, called upon Jesus Himself to avenge the mockery of his name and religion. And immediately the fortune of the battle changed.

The dashing charge of the Hungarians had carried them too far. The Turks recovering themselves from the onslaught closed in on them on every side. A javelin thrown,, it is said by Murad himself, brought Ladislaus's horse to the ground. The Janissaries crowded round him, and a moment later his

[1] The Turkish spelling is Jeni Cheri (new troops).

head was shown to his soldiers on a lance, his slayer exclaiming: "Hungarians, behold the head of your King."

A general mêlée followed, and the flower of the Hungarian army was left dead on the field. John Hunyadi and Cardinal Julian escaped with a remnant of that splendid host. The Cardinal was murdered, as he fled, by one of his soldiers who was prompted to this act because he knew that the churchman's pockets were filled with gold, but Hunyadi made good his flight, and lived to fight on many another day.

The Balkans were reconquered, but the Turks had also suffered a heavy loss, and the grief of the Sultan for his soldiers was mingled with a generous regret for the young King of Hungary. Forgetting the treachery of his foe, and remembering only his courage, Murad erected a column to the memory of Ladislaus on the field of Varna.

Parties of Kurds, Armenians, and natives of Asia Minor were scattered over the field collecting the spoils of the

dead, booty which the haughty Janissaries scorned, and which was always abandoned to the irregular troops. Some had pursued the fugitives up the valley and returned with occasional prisoners, waifs, and strays which the tide of battle had left behind. One such party brought with them a young woman and a child. The former, in the full bloom of youth and beauty, wore the graceful holiday dress of a Servian peasant, the white muslin skirt and blouse striped with pink and gold, and the close-fitting black vest embroidered in silver. The silver clasp of her girdle, and the amber beads around her neck had not been disturbed, but her cap and veil had fallen off, and their absence displayed a wealth of golden hair, which belonged rather on the shores of the Baltic than on those of the Black Sea. The child, a girl of three years, which she carried in her arms was the counterpart of herself, and the two formed a rich and unhoped for prize.

The soldiers were discussing among

themselves how they could most quickly dispose of their captives, when the question was answered by the appearance on the scene of a Greek, who followed the army and who was well known as a purchaser of female captives. The bargain was made, the soldiers had no means of transporting their prizes, and wished to see their value in ready money, and almost before the young woman knew what had happened, she had changed owners.

Leaving the battle-field, the Greek led her by a path between the hills to where the Turkish camp was being hastily constructed, and to his own tent which was already firmly fixed, for not being a fighting man he had been able to devote more time to its erection. An old Greek woman and a negro slave were seated at the door of the tent. The woman whom the Greek saluted as mother arose and went with them inside the tent, where she set food before the captives, olives and bread and wine. The Greek, whose name was Cymon,

then tried to learn something from the young woman regarding herself. Having accosted her in Greek and Turkish without eliciting a reply he spoke to her in Italian, which language she understood; and he was soon in possession of her history.

She was a native of Pomerania, and had followed her husband, a German adventurer, to Italy, where he had fought under one standard and another. They had led a wandering life between the cities and the camps, till chance had brought them in the train of a French count to Hungary. This was their first battle in the Hungarian service, and such a one as they had never seen before, for in Italy war (being carried on by mercenaries who had nothing at stake but their pay) was, as the young woman observed, mere play, but here it was deadly earnest.

Her life had, she admitted, been a hard one, but full of excitement which she liked, and all lives had their good times and their bad. Her husband, she

feared, had been killed. She had searched the battle-field, and had not found him; had he been living, she knew he would never have fled and left her behind. Here her story ended with a burst of tears. Her name was Minna and the child's name was Violetta, a name which she had learned in Italy where she was born.

It grew dark, and the old woman lighted the lamps which hung round the pole of the tent. Minna gradually stopped crying, and began to sing to her child an old German song whose monotonous rhythm soon put her to sleep. Whereupon, after holding her awhile in her arms, she laid her down on some cushions in a corner. Scarcely had she done so when the curtains of the tent were thrown back, and the negro exclaimed in a tone of suppressed excitement, "Nizameddin Bey!"

Cymon sprang forward to receive with due respect his distinguished visitor, and there entered a young man, whose beauty and noble bearing so astonished

Minna, who had been taught that the Turks were monsters, that for the moment she forgot everything else and gazed at him in silent wonder. Nizameddin Bey was tall and graceful with the grace of the Orient; he wore a white turban round his helmet, and his robe of crimson and gold brocade was thrown back, disclosing a suit of silvered mail of Damascus workmanship, and the hilt of a jewelled scimiter. His black eyes, full of fire, were turned at once to Minna and rested on her with a look of delight which at once pleased and frightened her. He began to speak to Cymon in Turkish.

"The eagles first," he said, "and the vultures afterwards. The Turk has fought the battle, and again the sly Greek has carried off the fairest prize."

"Ah, Bey Effendi," replied Cymon, "the Turk is a soldier, but the Greek is a man of commerce and trade. You win wealth with the sword, but we earn it peacefully on the counter and scales.

My slave meets with my Lord's approbation?"

"Yes, she is beautiful and a type that I do not know. Surely not a Servian peasant, though in the dress?"

"No, Bey Effendi, she is a German, from the far shores of the Baltic, a woman of the north whose youth and beauty will not fade."

The Bey interrupted him with a wave of his hand. "Your price?" he said.

"One hundred Turkish pounds."

"And you bought her for twenty. Our proverb says truly: 'One Jew is worth seven Greeks.'"

"Yes, Bey Effendi, and the proverb says also, 'one Greek is worth seven Armenians,' rejoice then that I am only a Greek."

Nizameddin Bey laughed. "Talking is your own art," he said. Then he added: "Well, I will pay your price." Suddenly his eye fell upon the sleeping child. "And that is included in the sum?"

"No, Bey Effendi," said Cymon hastily, "the child is not for sale."

"It must be. It is the law of the Prophet that in the sale of captives the mother must never be separated from the child."

"Ah, Bey Effendi, that is a law for you; but not for me, I am a Christian."

"You are a dog," said Nizameddin. "The Christian religion teaches the principles of humanity also, only by such as you are they disregarded. Ladislaus disregarded his treaty, and his treachery has cost him his life."

Cymon turned pale and began to whine and beg the Bey Effendi not to ask for the child on which he hoped one day to make his fortune. Suddenly he was interrupted by Minna, who seeming to grasp by instinct the import of the scene rose from her place and throwing herself on her knees before the Bey implored him, if he took her to take also her child. Nizameddin looked at her with flashing eyes, and to her astonishment answered her in a few words of Italian, bidding her

to be of good cheer and that she should keep her child. Minna's eyes filled with tears of joy, and seizing the Turk's hand, she kissed it again and again.

Nizameddin smiled and then, turning again to Cymon said: "Call my servant; you shall have the gold at once, a hundred Turkish pounds for the mother and child."

Cymon unheeding the command continued to whine and beg the Bey Effendi to consider, but the old woman went hastily to the door and called in the Bey Effendi's slave, a stalwart Nubian, who carried his master's purse, a large bag of knitted silk strung with coral, through whose meshes came the gleam of gold.

"A hundred pounds," said Nizameddin, and the slave counted the sum carefully out on a tray which stood on a folding stool. Cymon still paid no attention, but the old woman who watched the gold pieces as a cat watches a mouse, seized them at last in her claw-like fingers and plunged them into a leather bag which hung at her side. Then she went to the

bed, and taking up the sleeping child laid her in Minna's arms, and signed to her to go. But Minna stood still, not knowing what to do until the Bey took her by the hand and led her out of the tent.

Then indeed Cymon threw himself on the ground and screamed with rage. "He has robbed me," he cried, "he has robbed me; it is always so, the Turk always tramples on and despoils the Greek; that child would have made my fortune," and he ended with a volley of oaths.

"Be quiet," hissed his mother, "or something worse will happen to you. You know the Turk, and you know he will take what he wants, and none can withstand him. Look at the King of Hungary lying dead on the field, and be glad that the Bey has paid you the hundred pounds. That gives you eighty pounds profit, a good day's work, a good day's work."

And outside Nizameddin paused, and holding Minna's hand in his, pointed to the east where in the soft, clear, blue

sky, glimmered the silver crescent of the new moon.

"Look," he said, "the moon of Islam. To-day you have lost all that made your life; from a free woman you are now a slave. But fear not, as the crescent rises in the East and silvers the world with its light, so a new life begins for you to-night."

Minna looked at him in wonder and in admiration (for what woman can resist beauty combined with chivalry?). Was this the Turk whom she had been taught to dread, the infidel with whom one need hold no faith? Her husband had been a Christian and a German like herself, but never had he been a handsome and gallant gentleman like this, and sometimes he had beaten her when he was in wine. Still she had loved him or thought so, which with so many women is the same.

But now he was dead or at least dead to her, and her life was changed for the worse, or was it for the better? Unconsciously she embraced the first

principle of Islam resignation to the will of God. Minna knew no logic, but one thing she knew, the Greek would have robbed her of her child, and the Turk had given it back to her. That was enough! and as the Bey's black eyes met hers, she smiled. And he understood at once the workings of her simple mind and, stooping suddenly, kissed her ripe red lips.

The sound of Turkish music reached them, wild and sweet. Lanterns flashed like fireflies through the night. The air was soft and laden with the perfume of the yellow locust, and over all shone the new moon of Islam.

II

Thirteen years had passed since the battle of Varna, and again it was the month of May. Again the yellow locusts were in blossom, and the meadows full of flowers, but the world was changed. The sword of Murad had been sheathed, and Murad was in the

tomb while a greater reigned in his stead! The Greek Empire was a thing of the past, and the seventy Emperors of the East, of whom *one* was both great and good, had fretted through their parts and dragged them out for more than eleven hundred years, and were all gone to the shades at last. Four years ago Constantine the Thirteenth and last, had wound up the long rôle. Mohammed the Second had taken Constantinople; and in what had been for centuries, the capital of Christendom and of the world, the cross had given place to the crescent, and the Empire of Constantine the First was the prize of the victorious Turks.

Santa Sophia was now a mosque, but the Sultan had disdained the palaces of the Emperors, stained with so many crimes, and so much blood, and while the Serail was in construction, resided principally as before, at Adrianople in his wonderful palace of Jehan Numa (the watch-tower of the world). But now he was on the Bosphorus and living in a

kiosk on the mountain above Soutari on the Asiatic shore, a kiosk which has long since disappeared, but on whose site now stands the white palace of Prince Yousef Ezeddin.

It was the hour of noon. The Sultan had ridden out with his train in the morning and had not yet returned, and a dreamy stillness brooded over the golden kiosk. In the anteroom overlooking the court-yard, a few eunuchs and pages were lounging, and by a window stood a man in Greek costume in whom we meet again the slave dealer, Cymon. His eyes were fixed on a group in the court-yard below. A black slave, his own, whom we have seen at Varna holding the bridle of an ass, on which sat a woman wrapped in a black ferejeh and shrouded, all but her eyes, in what is now known as the Persian veil, thick and black as night.

So absorbed was he that he started violently when some one touched him on the arm and called his name. It was a black slave, and as the Greek's

memory was good, a moment's scrutiny told him who he was, the favourite slave of Nizameddin Bey.

"Well," he said, "Halim, how fares it with you? It is long since we met."

"Good," replied the slave, "my master is in favour with the Sultan, and I am in favour with my master. You and I met last at Varna."

"Yes, yes," said Cymon, "many things are changed since then. But tell me—I sold your master a slave then, a woman of the Franks; what has become of her?"

"Oh," said the slave, "you did her a great service when you sold her to my master. He made her his wife soon afterwards, and he has taken no other. She is beautiful, and her beauty does not fade, and he still loves her as at first."

"Has she borne him children?"

"Yes, three, our Selim Bey is twelve years old and Nazli Hanoum is nine, and little Edhem Bey is five. God has smiled on my master in everything."

"And," said Cymon, "she had a child,

whom Nizameddin Bey took from me, a little girl."

"Yes, poor child, I think it was nine years ago, we were at my master's house at Broussa, and she was playing in the garden, and what happened we do not know, but she must have fallen into the water and been swept away, for we never found her. And the same day our little Lady Nazli was born, so Allah took away one daughter from my mistress and gave her another; wonderful are the ways of Allah!"

Cymon smiled a strange smile, and rubbed his hands as at some pleasing recollection, and at this moment the door opened, and no less a personage than the Kisslar Aga entered the room. Every one rose and bowed profoundly, and Cymon striding hastily forward seized the black hand which glittered with jewels, and pressed it to his lips.

The Kisslar Aga was tall and of majestic bearing, with an intelligent countenance, bright black eyes, and on each cheek the three scars, which are the

mark of an Ethiopian slave. He wore a long robe of blue satin embroidered in silver, a jewelled girdle and dagger, a double chain of sequins round his neck, and a turban of spotless white.

"Well, Cymon," he said, "have you brought me your pearl of beauty?"

"Yes, Aga Effendi, may your years be a thousand and full of honours. She waits, well guarded, in the court-yard below."

"It is well," said the Kisslar Aga. "I had promised her to the Padishah this evening. Our Lady Sultana is in Adrianople, and there is great lack of beauty in the golden kiosk."

"That lack shall be no longer," said Cymon, and going to the window he signalled to his slave below, and in a few moments he and his veiled charge appeared in the anteroom.

"There, Prince of Agas, you have seen and know what a rose among maidens I bring you; truly you buy her cheaply, for she is worth her weight in gold."

The Kisslar Aga did not answer this

remark, but turning to a slave who followed him, took from him a bag of gold and handed it to Cymon, and gave him his hand again to kiss. This the Greek did with great devotion, and many protestations of eternal fidelity to his service, and prayers that he might be recommended to the Padishah.

The Kisslar Aga accustomed to adulation at length drew his hand away, and with a gracious word or two of leave-taking, took his new purchase, who remained perfectly silent and motionless, by the hand, and led her out of the room.

And now Cymon's hour had come. Approaching the slave of Nizameddin Bey, he whispered in his ear: "I have a message for your master. Tell him that Cymon, the Greek, has just sold to the Sultan the most beautiful maid in Constantinople. The portière of the Sultan's private apartments has fallen behind her, and her price is in Cymon's hands. Tell him that her name is Violetta, and that she is that child whom he took from me unjustly at

Varna, that she was not drowned at Broussa, but that Cymon took back his own. The Turk is a soldier, but the Greek is a man of business, courage conquers in the beginning, but wit and wisdom in the end."

"It will not be well for you when my master hears this," said the slave.

"I fear not, he may seek me, but he will not find me. You know the saying, 'The Turk to fight—the Greek to run away.' Give him my message; I have waited long for my revenge, but I have, it at last."

III

In the golden kiosk, the last room of the Sultan's apartments hung like a lantern of rainbow glass far out in the air, its crescent curve of windows commanding the East, South, and West. The walls of this apartment were tiled half way up, those green and white tiles always precious, and now, alas, so rare. The upper half was stuccoed in

arabesques of crimson and gold, which were repeated in the ceiling with a cornice of honeycomb cells. A magnificent Persian carpet covered the floor, and a divan ran around under the windows covered with crimson embroidered in gold. At one end of the divan stood a richly inlaid reading-desk, holding an illuminated copy of the Koran, and at the other a small table of the same workmanship, on which stood a silver dish of fruit, a tall enamelled flacon, an enamel cup, and a crystal bowl full of red roses. At the lower end of the room two chests of black carved oak, evidently the spoil of some Greek sacristy, flanked the arched door, which was hung with a portière of crimson and gold. From the ceiling, suspended by crimson cords, hung five silver lamps.

The windows which were glass arabesques and seemed, when the sun shone through them, mosaics of jewels, were now all open to the evening air. At one which faced the west, a tall graceful figure half stood, half knelt,

on the divan, watching the sunset. He was a young man in his twenty-seventh year with all the fire of youth, the vigour of a pure and noble race, and that high consciousness of power which a sovereign absolute, whose word is life or death, alone can feel. A Sultan by birth, and soldier and leader of men by the gift of God, Mohammed the Second stood on a pinnacle of glory which it has seldom been the fate of man to reach.

Here in the silence of his own apartments, armour and weapons laid aside, the Sultan was attired in a long robe of brocade of green and silver, so brilliant that it seemed a tissue of emeralds and diamonds. In his jewelled girdle was visible that dagger which may be seen in the treasury to-day, the handle of which is a solid mass of diamonds and the end one great emerald. He wore a turban of India muslin clasped in front with the Imperial aigrette; a collar of diamonds and emeralds encircled his neck, and on his right hand sparkled one jewel alone, his signet ring. But all

this splendour was subordinate to the majesty of the Sultan's presence, and the jewels themselves were subdued by the light and fire of the Sultan's eyes.

Mohammed's mother had been a Servian princess, his father represented the best blood of the Turks, and yet he in form and feature seemed an Arab of that type, free and desert-born, than which the world can show none more manly or more perfect. The nose was aquiline, the chin strong and noble, the mouth firm and beautiful, and the black eyes like stars, whose glance could pierce, it seemed, through armour or the heart. Every feature indicated the Arab, and Mohammed the Second might have been one of the early khalifs come to life again, a man not only born a king, but cast by nature in her most kingly mould.

The scene below him riveted the Sultan's gaze. Dark cypress woods descended from the kiosk to the sparkling waters of the Bosphorus, on whose

other shore, among cypress trees again, his new palace rose ,as if by magic on the ruins of that which had been the palace of the Cæsars. Behind loomed Santa Sophia, with the seven domes of Justinian and the four minarets of Mohammed, on which glittered four golden crescents. The greatest church the Christian world had known, a mosque! The cross supplanted by the new moon of Islam! And as Mohammed's eyes rested upon the emblems of his faith, they flashed with pleasure, for the love of his religion burned in his heart, and he held no conquest greater than that of Santa Sophia.

Beyond all this, behind the cypresses and the almond, and the Judas, trees in bloom, the sea of Marmora spread like a sheet of silver, the islands on its breast glowing like jewels, and still beyond rose the mountains, and above them all the snowy crest of Mount Olympus, far away in Greece. And then—the setting sun, the rose and green and purple clouds, and the golden evening light

which turned it all to a vision of enchantment.

The portière rustled, and there was the whisper of a soft step on the soft carpet. The Sultan turned and found the Kisslar Aga before him.

"I had not called you, Selim," said Mohammed.

"No, Padishah," replied the eunuch, "I came uncalled, but always in the service of my Lord and the desire to give him pleasure, and if I have presumed to divert from the sunset his imperial eyes it is that they may gaze on something still more beautiful."

"Ah, yes," the Sultan said; "you are a faithful servant, Selim, I remember," and his eyes flashed as when he had looked upon the crescents. "Where is she?"

"In the next room," replied the Kisslar Aga, "waiting the Padishah's pleasure."

"Bring her to me," said Mohammed.

Selim bowed low, and swiftly leaving the apartment, returned again in a moment leading by the hand a young

girl covered from head to foot with a silver bridal veil. Mohammed, with the eagerness of youth, advanced to meet her. Then, as the eunuch touched the veil, "no, no," he said, "go, Selim, I need you no longer, my hand will lift the veil."

The Kisslar Aga bowed again, and the young girl, who had been reared for this one destiny from the rosebud to the rose, was left alone with her master; the Sultan, ruler of Islam, and first and greatest sovereign of the world.

Mohammed paused a moment, and then slowly lifted the veil and threw it back so that it fell upon the carpet, and Violetta stood before him like the moon out of a cloud. Then he drew back and looked at her and smiled. The evening light fell upon her through the open window and made a glory of her golden curls which, crowned with a wreath of blood-red roses and dark leaves, flowed over her shoulders like the sun glades on the water.

Her milk-white skin, her rosy cheeks

and scarlet lips, and the soft rounded contours of her form all charmed the Sultan's senses. But that which charmed him most (for he was used to slaves who trembled and looked down) was Violetta's courage, for she raised her eyes to his, such dark-lashed violet eyes, as he had never seen, and looked at him, not like a slave, but like a princess.

Selim, whose art was to enhance the charms of beauty, had known how to dress this northern Venus. A caftan of turquoise satin embroidered in gold was clasped about her waist with a golden girdle studded with turquoises, and cut in a heart shape to show the rounded whiteness of her neck and bosom, like the vest which Bosnian women wear to-day. Below the caftan, which reached only to the knee, were wide trousers of pink and gold brocade, and pink slippers stiff with gold and pearls. Her arms were bare from the elbow, but clasped by no bracelets, and she wore no jewel anywhere but in her girdle, and only the red roses in her hair. A

moment passed in silence while they stood looking at each other, and then the Sultan spoke:

"I have seen many women," he said, "but none like you; whence do you come?"

Violetta's cheeks flushed rosier red, but her voice did not tremble as she answered: "Padishah, they tell me that I came from a far country in the north, beside a wild blue sea, but I cannot remember it, and know no land but this."

"What is your name?"

"My name is Violetta, Padishah."

"A name that suits you well; I think it means the blue-eyed flower of spring.

"The houris have black eyes, but they are for the faithful whose swords have conquered the next world as well as this.

"Their home is Paradise.

"The peris belong to this earth, and though they die with it, they are made to give delight. They must have blue eyes like yours!"

He looked at her again in silence, and she stood before him flushed with the excitement of the moment, and the mingled feelings of joy and fear that she had found favour in his sight. She appeared beautiful as the peris to whom he had likened her, fresh and radiant as morning and spring.

The Sultan was young and as he looked at her, a strange new feeling rose in his heart, a feeling which he had never known before. He had had many slaves, and most of them had pleased him, and satisfied him for the time. But he had held them lightly, for despite his youth, his mind was set on conquest, and he had dreamed, not of love, but of power and glory. Once only had he unveiled a princess, the bride whom the great Murad had given him, seeking to make him forget in a softer passion, his too great ambition. She was the daughter of a Turcoman ameer. She too had pleased him, and he had shown her all that respect and courtesy due a wife, and though six years had passed, he had

taken no other, and she was still his only Sultana. But love was not the cause, for, except for the fact that she remained and would hold always the first place, and that they came and went, the Ameer's daughter was no more to him than his Circassian, Greek, or Persian slaves.

But now the ambition of his life was satisfied. Constantinople was his. From the Danube to the Mediterranean all was his, and in Asia the whole Empire of the Turks. There were for the moment no more worlds to conquer. Nature and youth reasserted themselves, and Mohammed was ready for the one great passion which he had not known. Now his destiny had brought him this golden haired maid from the Baltic, this violet-eyed valkyr. And suddenly there rose a question to his lips which he would never before have thought of asking.

"Violetta," he said, "are you glad to be here in the golden kiosk? Are you willing to be mine?"

Violetta looked at him in surprise. Could it be that the Sultan could ask such a question.

"Padishah," she replied, "I am your slave."

"Yes," said Mohammed, "you are my slave, and I need ask no questions, for I may do with you as I will. But still, though it seems strange to you, I will have another answer.

"Suppose that you were not a slave but free, and I a man as other men, no more, and by some accident, against our customs, such as are related in all romantic tales, we had seen each other—"

The Sultan paused, the rôle was new to him and for a moment the Conqueror of Constantinople was at a loss for words.

"And then suppose I said, 'Violetta will you be mine?' How would you answer?"

"Oh, Padishah," said Violetta, trembling now and looking down indeed, "you honour me too much, I am your slave."

"I have told you that I do not want

a slave's answer," said Mohammed. "Speak, what do you fear?"

Then Violetta lifted her eyes again to his and said: "Myself, Padishah."

And now the Sultan flushed with pleasure as if he had been indeed no more than other men.

"Fear not yourself," he said, "but answer me. Tell me what would be your answer, 'yes' or 'no.'"

"Then," said Violetta, clasping her hands and blushing like the sunset, "may my Lord forgive me if I seem too bold, surely it is not for the Padishah to ask in vain. My answer would be 'yes.'"

And then hiding her face with her hands she stood before him like a discovered culprit, for she well knew that her answer had been a confession of love, love quick as the lightning's flash, as all Oriental love must be, and kindled in her heart by the first glance of the imperial eyes.

Mohammed smiled, and his eyes flashed with triumph and delight, and

something warmer which he had never shown in them before. Taking Violetta's hands, one in each of his, he drew them down and held them.

"Look at me again," he said, "it is not often that I find eyes that meet my own like yours."

And Violetta looked at him again, this time with her heart in her eyes. And suddenly Mohammed took her in his arms and kissed her. She had fulfilled her destiny.

The evening light grew softer and the sunset gold changed first to red and then to violet. The scent of flowers and the whirr and twitter of birds flying homeward came through the open windows, and then suddenly the sky flushed again with the light of the afterglow. The Sultan led his new slave into the glass lantern, and pointed first to Europe, then to Asia.

"Look," he said, "my Empire. The world holds nothing richer or more beautiful, and I have made it mine."

Violetta looked for a moment at the

fair scene below her and then at him. She did not wonder, for it seemed to her but natural that he should conquer all things.

"Allah," he said, "has given me all that I have asked, and I have had all things but one, and now you have been sent to me to bring me that."

"Oh, Padishah," said Violetta, looking at him half in hope, half in fear, "what is it that I have brought you?"

"Something," said Mohammed, "that I have neither known nor valued, and that you alone have taught me—love."

A smile like sunlight shone on Violetta's lips and in her eyes. That she was destined for the Sultan she had known for long, and she had thought that she might please him, without knowing whether she wished it so or not. But that he should love her, was more than she had ever hoped or dreamed.

Then, as by the magic of some charm, she seemed to lose all maidenly timidity, and all remembrance that he was the

Sultan, and she his slave. All her soul filled with one passion only, she lifted her white arms and clasped them around his neck. And Mohammed, to whom her boldness was a new delight, her love a treasure, strange and sweet, clasped her against his heart and kissed her, kisses without number, burning and tender as the stars of a tropical night.

Slowly and softly the afterglow faded, and in the woods and gardens the nightingales began to sing. One by one the stars came out, and in the East there rose in the pale blue and glimmered through the open jewel casement, a silver crescent, the new moon of Islam!

IV

The crescent that had silvered the May night, which for Mohammed was the dawn of love, waxed to the full and waned. The blossoms of the fruit trees fell like stars setting in a dark sky, and the orchard changed from pink and

white to green. The wistaria bloomed over all in a glory of purple and faded, giving place to the roses of June. And when the next new moon shone, now in the sky as rich and soft as turquoise, Mohammed showed it to Violetta from the window saying, "Look, the moon of Islam! Twice dear to me now, for since it shone on that first night, it is the sign and symbol of our love."

The word love was often spoken by Mohammed now and came as naturally from his lips as once the terms and commands of war, which now were unuttered. The time which had been fixed for his return to Adrianople had come and gone, and he still lingered in the golden kiosk. Neither the Sultana nor any of his Odalisques were summoned from thence, but in the harem, Violetta, surrounded by attendant slaves and eunuchs, black and white, reigned without a rival, supreme and alone.

Jewel merchants, silk merchants, goldsmiths, and dealers in all that is rich and rare, climbed the mountain with

their laden asses that the Sultan might choose gifts for his favourite from their stores, and Mohammed gave his gold, as he did all things, with a royal hand and laid the wealth of his Empire at Violetta's feet.

She was grateful, but not spoiled by all this splendour, for though these bright and beautiful things delighted her in themselves they delighted her still more, because they were the Sultan's gifts. The jewel which she prized the most, and beside which all the others were as nothing, was Mohammed's love. She was happy, perfectly happy. She loved the Sultan with all her heart, and all the fresh young forces of her nature. She lived in that love and in the present only, without a thought for either the future or the past.

The June moon waned also. Midsummer was past, but the heat waxed instead of waning, and the third new moon which marked the course of royal love, shone in a breathless night, blazing with stars and faint with sweet

perfume. Again Mohammed and Violetta looked at it from the eastern window.

"The moon of Islam waxes and wanes," he said, "and goes and comes again, but our love waxes only, and grows ever more and more."

"Yes," said Violetta, "though it was so great at first, it seemed that it could be no greater, so therefore it is like the moon, for who has seen the crescent only, dreams not of the moon's splendour at the full. And we at first thought that our love was all that love could be, and now we know that it grows always more and more."

The golden kiosk was indeed a paradise of love in this golden summer-time. But the realm of Mohammed extended beyond its walls, and there was a scene of growing discontent. The Turks, whose victorious arms had made them the terror of the world, were restless when idle. The Viziers and Emirs, Pashas and Beys waited impatiently in their palaces along the Bosphorus, where

everything reminded them of their conquests, their usual summons to the presence of the Padishah.

Days passed and weeks, and no divan was held. The Grand Vizier transacted business in the Sultan's name, and he or any other minister who sought from necessity an audience of the Padishah was received impatiently, and with all haste dismissed. The Sūltan rode no more a-hunting or a-hawking. His pages and attendants sulked in the court-yard and the ante-chambers, their occupation gone. Worst of all, the Janissaries missed their leader and murmured at his absence, and their murmurs rolled like thunder through the Turkish Empire.

Mohammed, they said, had forgotten that he was the successor of the Prophet, and the leader and ruler of Islam, whether in peace or war. He had forgotten his soldiers, his people, his Empire. His sword was rusting in the scabbard, and he was the slave of love. These murmurs reached the gates of the

golden kiosk, and entered, but only into the court-yard and the outer chambers.

The Kisslar Aga heard them, but only shook his head and said that he would not disturb the pleasure of the Padishah, nor should any one else, that the Janissaries were ever troublesome and discontented, and that time would set all right. And the word of the Kisslar Aga is law in the Serail.

Time went on and the Sultan knew nothing, for he had in truth forgotten his Janissaries and his Empire. The third moon waxed and waned. The storm gathered, rolling up from the East and the West, from Europe and Asia; it darkened and blackened and burst. And—passed away.

Brilliant and triumphant as the career of Mohammed had been, he still had learned that fortune, like the moon, had her reverses which were not bright. Twice the great Murad had abdicated the sovereignty, and placed his son upon the throne, and twice had he resumed

his power. Mohammed knew that Allah gives and takes, and now when came this trouble with his people (his first and last), he was weighed in the balance and not found wanting.

It was a sultry day late in July when came at last the Grand Vizier, and told the Padishah what he should long ago have told, that now the discontent of the Imperial Janissaries had reached the point where the next step must be revolt. The Sultan listened in silence, pained at the thought that his soldiers could turn against him, and then perhaps with self-reproach that he had neglected his duties as their leader, perhaps with anger also, but without fear, for that he knew not, of the result. Then he dismissed the Grand Vizier saying only, "let my soldiers come, I will meet them."

He remained awhile wrapt in deep thought and fighting a battle with himself. It was the afternoon, and slowly on the stillness grew a muffled sound, first distant and then near and

nearer, the tramp of marching feet. The Sultan sat alone, and like the waves of a spring flood slowly, resistlessly, they came and closed around his palace, like a ring of steel, the flower, the pride, the terror of his Empire, the Janissaries!

The portière of the apartment was pushed aside, and the Kisslar Aga rushed breathless and panic-stricken into the Imperial presence.

"Padishah, Padishah!" he cried, "the Janissaries! the Janissaries!"

"My soldiers," said Mohammed, "let them await till I have time for them; first send me my Violetta."

The summons was unnecessary, for at that moment, Violetta, who had heard the tumult in her apartments, came unbidden to the Sultan's presence, and full of love and fear threw herself on her knees before him, just where the light of the setting sun fell full upon her, bathing her in a golden glory.

Mohammed looked at her in silence for a moment. She was more beautiful than she had been at first, more radiant.

The change in her was like that of spring to summer, that change which is wrought by love alone; even the tints of her attire were brighter, for now she wore the colours of the Turkish Empire, blood-red and green and gold. Her girdle clasped her like a jewelled rainbow, and her wreath of roses was replaced by a tiara of emeralds and rubies. The Kisslar Aga withdrew, and they were alone, and then Mohammed rising lifted her from her knees, and clasped her to his heart.

"Oh, my Lord," she said, "what is this tumult?"

But he kissed her first, and then answered carelessly, "my soldiers, Violetta; they say that Mohammed has forgotten them, and clamour for their leader."

"Oh, my Lord," said Violetta, "is that all?"

"Yes," replied Mohammed, "that is all, but it is true; I had forgotten them. These last three moons I have been a lover only, Violetta. I have neglected,

forgotten, given up all else for you, and I might do so still were I a man like other men; but I am not, and now I find that love, or love at least like this, is the one thing denied the Sultan of the Turks."

"Oh! My Lord," said Violetta, filled with a sudden fear, "what would you do?"

And Mohammed answered: "It has been said that man is first a man, and then a king, but it is not true. He to whom Allah has given sovereign power is first a king."

"My Lord is right," said Violetta, forgetting her fear of the moment before in her admiration of him, "and as a king, Mohammed will never fail."

"I cannot," said Mohammed, "and now Violetta, I go to meet my Janissaries, but first I wished for you, for one more kiss."

He stopped and looked at her for a moment with a long lingering look, and then went on:

"Violetta, you know, for I have told you many times, but I will tell you still

once more, you are the only woman I have loved."

"Yes, my Lord," she said, "I know, Allah has given me your love."

"Then, Violetta, remember this always."

"Oh, my Lord," she said, "could I forget that you have loved me? Were I banished from your presence and lived on without you for a hundred years, that memory would be my only thought, not only here, but I would take it with me to Paradise."

"To Paradise," repeated Mohammed; "yes, Violetta, and not the memory only but the love itself. You alone have my love here, and you shall take it with you to Paradise."

Then he took her in his arms and kissed her with many kisses.

The impatient shouts of the Janissaries and the clatter of their arms came through the windows, breaking the wonted stillness of the golden kiosk, and at last Mohammed unclasped the arms that would have held him, and

with one last kiss left her. Then walking through the length of his apartments to one which had a balcony, he stepped out through the window and showed himself to the Janissaries, suddenly and alone.

There was the breathless silence of a moment. As though by magic the tumult was stilled and awed by his presence, and then Mohammed spoke:

"My Janissaries have come to me uncalled; what is it that they seek?"

"Our leader," cried a voice, and here and there was heard "Chokyosha Padishah!" more perhaps from force of habit than intent, and then an undistinguishable tumult of cries, till at last Mohammed made them hear that one of them should speak for all.

Thereupon stepped forward just below the balcony a giant, Hassan by name, he who had been the first to scale the wall of Constantinople, and whose prestige in consequence was only equalled by his boldness.

"Chokyosha Padishah!" he said, and made the salute.

Mohammed looked at him, then let his glance sweep the round of the tumultuous gathering of the most splendid soldiers that the world then knew, than which it has known no better. Pride flashed in his eyes, and a flush mantled to his cheek. He had forgotten these his Janissaries, he had not seen them for three moons, or thought of them, and now they came as mutineers and rebels, but they still were his. He knew how well they loved him, and (so contradictory is the human heart) he felt perhaps for the first time how dear they were to him.

"Hassan," he said at length, "you were the first to plant a Moslem foot on the walls of Constantinople. I had not thought that you would also be the first to turn against your Lord."

"Padishah," said Hassan, "I am not against my Lord. Neither are these; we are faithful subjects and soldiers. No one is against the Padishah but himself."

"Boldly spoken," said the Sultan,

"but remember, Hassan, there are barriers higher than those of Constantinople."

"Padishah," replied the undaunted Hassan, "if we speak boldly, it is because we have earned the right. You indeed have led us to victory, but our swords have carved your Empire. Our lives are devoted to your service. We may not marry. We have no homes, no wives, no children, no ties like other men. Padishah! the Janissaries live and fight and die for you alone!"

It was all true; Mohammed did not answer, but his hand, which clasped the railing of the balcony, trembled with a sudden strong emotion. Confused cries interrupted the oration of the Janissary for a few moments, but then he obtained silence and went on.

"Padishah, you have led us to victory, you have loved and prized us, and we have always been ready to give our lives for you. But now, Padishah, all is changed. You have forgotten your soldiers, we see your face no more, you

are shut up in your palace like the khalif of Bagdad in the khalifate's decline. You care no more for your Empire, your soldiers, your people. Your sword is rusting in the scabbard, and you are the slave of love."

The portière rustled behind Mohammed, and the Kisslar Aga appeared beside him trembling with fright. "Oh, Padishah," he whispered with that familiarity permitted to his office, "content the Janissaries; it is a question of your life and crown."

"Am I a slave," replied Mohammed, "to tremble at threats? Shall I fear my own soldiers? No, I will die when it is the will of God, but not by their hands, nor will I lose my sceptre, and what I will do is not for them, but for myself."

"Padishah," cried Hassan,[1] "the leader of the Janissaries must be a soldier, not a recluse of the harem. Are you and will you be our leader still

[1] See Appendix III.

or not? We have come here to-day to ask this question, and to receive your answer, Padishah."

Mohammed folded his arms and looked at his rebellious soldiers with a glance which awed them into silence, with all the pride and fire of his Imperial race and his Imperial nature.

Then he said, his voice clear and calm in the sudden stillness: "You shall have my answer."

Turning he whispered something in Selim's ear, and the eunuch in response disappeared through the window, and in silence the Sultan and soldiers waited. Then the curtain was lifted again, and Selim reappeared with a female figure wrapped in a silver veil.

Mohammed drew her to him and quickly, as if he feared to hesitate, tore off her veil, and showed her to the Janissaries in all her beauty. The last rays of the sunset fell upon her, and all eyes turned to her and rested there; Mohammed's also. She lifted her eyes to his and ceased to tremble; for she

read something there which made her forget herself.

The fierce soldiers surrounded them like a stormy sea. The silence caused by the surprise of the Sultan's action in unveiling his favourite before them gave way to a tumult of confused and inarticulate cries. But in the midst of all this storm and tumult Mohammed and Violetta were still for a moment alone. Neither spoke, but Mohammed clasped his left arm around her with one long last look and then with his right hand he drew the emerald hilted dagger from his belt. The Janissaries saw the blade flash in the air, but Violetta looked only in her Imperial lover's eyes and saw it not, nor knew her destiny till he had plunged it into her heart.

A great shout arose which seemed to rend the air, but Violetta heard it not. Her lips curled in a smile, as if all fear was past, and hope remained. Her eyes clung to Mohammed's, and with one last look of love, she passed from this world to the other.

Still holding her, the Sultan turned to his soldiers, and raising his dagger in the air that all might see it was red, he cried: "Mohammed is not the slave of love."

And now the soldiers' shouts were cries of joy, and the air trembled to the sound of "Chokyosha Padishah!"

The sun had set, and as Mohammed turned his eyes from West to East, a glimmering light appeared behind the mountains. As if spell-bound, he gazed and slowly, slowly, pale, as a soul ascending into heaven, cold and bright, there rose and glittered in the summer night, a silver crescent, the new moon of Islam.[1]

[1] See Appendix IV.

THE HEART OF BOSNIA

I

IT was the month of August in the year 1815; the scene, Bosnia. Two months before the fate of Europe had been decided by the battle of Waterloo. The allies were resting like tigers after their bloody feast, and there was an interim in history.

In Turkey alone, the fall of Napoleon made little difference. Mahmoud, the reformer, sat on the Ottoman throne, but the reforms which he afterwards carried out so successfully were not yet inaugurated. The Empire was torn with internal dissensions, and the only person who really reigned, and that only in his own provinces, was Ali Tepelenti, the terrible Pacha of Yanina.

Constant outbreaks occurred. Fire and sword ravaged not only the distant

provinces, but held sway in Constantinople itself, where the Sultan was often a prisoner inside the walls of the Serail. It was the darkest hour of the Turkish Empire, the last days of the Janissaries.

It was the afternoon and a troop of Spahis was riding up the valley of the Verbas, the forest-clad mountains rising like dark green walls on either side, and the wild river dashing down between. The road was narrow, and the Spahis rode in a long line and at their head their leader, Abul Abbas Bey.

This Abul Abbas, thus renamed, was not a Turk, but an Albanian Prince, who had been taken prisoner in childhood, adopted by the Sultan Selim, and brought up with his son Mahmoud. The two young men had been indeed like brothers and were still, though the one now sat upon the throne, and the other followed the changing fortunes of war.

Abul Abbas was a handsome young man with all the wild dark beauty of his race: the olive skin, the bright black

eyes, the jet black hair and curled moustache, the fine clear cut features and teeth like pearls. Fierce and graceful as a panther, hot blooded, warm hearted, generous, and brave, he was a soldier by nature.

A Turk in all things else, he wore the magnificent Albanian costume, which suited him to perfection: the tight-fitting jacket or crimson velvet embroidered in gold, the white kilt and loose white sleeves, yellow morocco shoes and crimson velvet leggings, stiff with gold, and a crimson velvet cap bordered with Russian sable, from which hung a long gold tassel that dangled about his left ear. Two ornamented pistols were thrust in his crimson sash, and a short sword hung at his side, the hilt and scabbard bright with gold and jewels.

At his elbow rode his servant, a young man of his own age slender and dark, with a sinister but very clever face, a Greek, whose fate, different as their social status was, had been initially much like his own.

Leonidas, the son of an innkeeper at Megara, had been like Abul Abbas torn from his home in childhood by the Turks and carried to Constantinople. But there the difference began. Abul Abbas had been taken at an age so tender that he had lost all recollection of his home, name, and religion, and thought himself, and doubtless was, much happier in his life in the Serail as the Sultan's adopted son, than he could ever have been in his own country. To him, his captivity was his good fortune. But Leonidas had been, when taken by the Turks, already fourteen years old. He remembered everything and with regret, and though he too was brought to the Serail, he came there as a slave.

He had not changed his name or his religion, and in his heart, he hated all Turks and thirsted for revenge. But he was clever, and outwardly he tried to please his masters and succeeded very well. He had been given some years before, to Abul Abbas, whose entire

confidence he had won, and whom he served with an intense devotion, partly real, because the Bey was kind and generous to him, and partly because he saw that his master's interest was his own.

"Leonidas," said Abul Abbas suddenly, "have I not heard you say that you knew the Governor of Bosnia, Mukhtar Pacha?"

"Yes, Bey Effendi, I know him."

"By the Sultan's orders," said Abul Abbas, "we must stay here and guard him in his mountain nest, and fight for him if need be. It will be dull, and I fear will lack all excitement. I would at least like to think that he is worthy of our sacrifice; what do you know of him?"

The Greek's eyes flashed, but he replied laconically, "nothing good."

At that moment, they rounded the shoulder of a mountain and came suddenly on one of the most beautiful and wonderful sights that Europe has to show, the cataract of the Verbas. Bosnia is a land of mountains, long

ranges covered with dark forests, and deep rich valleys watered by wild mountain streams.

King of its rivers is the Verbas. For miles it rushes down between the mountains in a succession of rapids, growing ever wilder in its course, till at last it takes a leap of seventy-five feet in the air, and hurls its waters with a sound like thunder and a mist of foam and spray, into the gorge below.

The Spahis had come out just below an old church and monastery and from this point is the finest view. On the left a mountain rising like a wall, and on the right another less precipitate on whose side, and just above the cataract, the town of Jaice hangs like an eagle's nest. It is a quaint little Turkish town, a relic of the past, with its old walls, its grey stone houses with their latticed bay windows, and the red roofs and the minarets of its seven mosques.

Between the two mountains thunders the cataract, a sight which none can

worthily describe, but at which those who see it stand and hold their breath, as did the Spahis. Abul Abbas had been reared in the Serail, but a born mountaineer has the love of the mountains in his breast, and now as he drew rein and looked at the stupendous scene before him, it was with a wild and fierce delight. Under the embroidery of the Albanian jacket, beat the Albanian heart.

The Spahis rode past the church and monastery, long, square, and white like an iceberg set down in the green valley, and thence up the side of the mountain, the road taking a sharp and sudden rise.

Jaice has two gates, one toward the river, the other landward, and it was at the latter that Abul Abbas and his Spahis entered the town and rode down the principal street, which is twelve feet broad and paved with flags. On either side are houses with over-hanging bay windows, and below the usual Oriental bird-box shops, in which the proprietors sit cross-legged working at their various

trades or merely patiently awaiting their customers.

A few Bosnian peasants in their picturesque costumes as well as a few Turkish irregulars and three or four Turkish women in black veils were lounging in the streets. The residence of the Governor, a square, whitewashed house with the usual bay windows on the upper floor was marked by the Turkish flag, which hung over the doorway, and by the presence of two sentries leaning on their muskets and indulging in an animated conversation with each other.

The noise of the horses' hoofs on the stone pavement had brought several persons to the door, and as Abul Abbas alighted he was received by the Lieutenant, and the Secretary of the Governor, a large and important black eunuch and two or three of the principal citizens of Jaice. All were apparelled in Turkish costume more or less gorgeous, with white turbans around their fezes. (Mahmoud had not yet introduced his dress

reforms, and they indeed have had no effect in Bosnia, where the Oriental dress still reigns supreme.)

Everything in Jaice was on a small and necessarily simple scale, which made it impossible for the Governor to keep up the usual state.

Abul Abbas, followed by Leonidas, was ushered at once into a low, white-washed room with a divan at one end, covered with Turkish rugs, on which sat a tall handsome man in the forties, with aquiline features, a black beard, and eagle eye—Mukhtar Pacha. The Pacha's dress was rich and costly, jewels glittered on his fingers, and he seemed as out of place in his surroundings as an eagle in a sparrow's nest.

He invited Abul Abbas to sit beside him. The usual Oriental compliments were interchanged, and then the Pacha informed the Bey that he had received the Sultan's letter in regard to him, and that he thanked the Padishah for sending him so valiant a defender, though in truth no such defender was necessary,

as the province was for the moment at peace, and his own forces sufficient for his protection. He explained that there was no room for the Spahis in the town, for which reason he had ordered them to be received into the monastery in the valley below, a command which, he added, did not please the monks, though they had ample room, and was therefore liable to dissatisfy the peasantry, who in Bosnia are all Christians and as such under the domination of the monks. Finally he regretted that he would be unable to receive Abul Abbas into his own house, as it was small and hardly afforded room enough for his own household; but that he had provided for him other quarters, namely, a small house just inside the wall.

Abul Abbas was by no means pleased with his reception, but he accepted it in silence, drank a cup of coffee with the Pacha, smoked a cigarette, and then arose and took his leave. The secretary and the fat negro were waiting at the door to be his guides, and remounting

his horse he followed them through a street but four feet wide, to his house, a picturesque little box which hung over the city wall, and into whose windows the south wind blew the spray of the cataract.

There were three rooms on each floor, all white-washed and bare. Abul Abbas established himself on the upper floor with Leonidas, leaving the ground floor to the cook, and cook's boy, whom he had brought with him, and four Spahis, whom he retained, and the rest of his troop rode back again to the monastery in the valley. The Bey's rugs, cushions, and curtains, his table service and kitchen utensils were unpacked from the backs of his sumpter-mules, and the little house on the wall was soon in a habitable condition.

The negro of Mukhtar Pacha, who possessed the curiosity usual to his race, remained during the establishment, and assisted Leonidas with his advice. The Greek in turn, who did nothing without a motive, treated him with the greatest

deference, flattered him and so won his confidence that in an hour he had learned everything about Mukhtar Pacha, which he wished to know..

Meantime the cook whose name was Assaf disposed his stores of rice, coffee, sugar, and spices, and sat down to wait for the provisions which he felt sure the Governor would send his master. But no provisions coming, he finally sallied forth in a high state of indignation (followed by his boy with a basket) to search the Bosnian market.

Meat is rare in Bosnia with the exception of tame ducks and game, and the choicest food is furnished by the mountain streams, which are full of trout and fresh-water crabs. Assaf soon discovered the scarcity of meat and returned home with his basket full of fish and vegetables, tomatoes, cucumbers, and maize.

Abul Abbas had established himself in a back room, which had a latticed bay window hanging out over the waterfall and commanded the view up and

down the valley. He had nothing to do, and gave himself up to his reflections. The cold reception of the Pacha had surprised him; being so high in favour with the Sultan, he expected to be treated with consideration by everybody, but he was young and had many things to learn.

He glanced around him and thought with regret of his luxurious apartments in the Serail, but only for a moment; he was a soldier and independent of such things. The only thing he dreaded was inaction, and it seemed that that would be his destiny here in Bosnia.

He knew the Sultan's reason for sending him away from Constantinople. His fiery disposition would not brook the tyranny of the Janissaries as Mahmoud himself was forced at times to do. Two or three times already he had opposed himself to their leader Kara Makan, and though his daring spirit had carried him through until now, the Sultan knew that it could not last, and that he would be cut short in the flower

of his career. He had therefore been saved from his enemies, and from himself, and exiled that he might live.

At dusk Leonidas entered, lighted the hanging lanterns, and brought up the supper.

"Bey Effendi," he said, as he set down the tray on a little table, brought like everything else from Stamboul, "there is no meat in Jaice. Assaf has searched the town in vain, and Mukhtar Pacha has sent you nothing; truly he has shown you but scant courtesy."

"It would seem so," replied Abul Abbas, and he began his supper with a good appetite.

Presently Leonidas resumed, "nor is his house so small or so crowded that he could not have entertained you. I have talked with Achmet, the guardian of his harem."

"Well," said Abul Abbas, "what then was his reason?"

"Jealousy," replied the Greek; "he, has a beautiful young wife who does not love him, nay Achmet says she

hates him, and therefore he dreads the presence of a man so young and handsome in his house."

"I should not see her in any case."

"No, but she could see you through the lattices, and women always find means of having their way. She will see you doubtless as it is, for the house has no garden, and all the windows look out on the street, and therefore Mukhtar Pacha resents your presence in the town."

"How many wives has he?" asked Abul Abbas. "I know he has a son in the Sultan's guards, and another among the pages."

"Yes, and two married daughters. All the children of his first wife, but she is dead, and he has only this one who is said to be so beautiful. She is a Persian."

"A Persian?"

"Yes, Bey Effendi. Three years ago Mukhtar Pacha was sent to Teheran, and there he married her, I know not how, but Achmet says she hates him,

and pines for her own country. Her nurse, who is a Persian also and came with her, tells him that she finds Mukhtar too old. When they were married he was forty and she fifteen, and the nurse says she would have preferred a youth nearer her own age. But be that as it may, she is not happy. The Pacha does everything to please her but in vain. She makes no secret of her indifference for him, and she is so beautiful that he is tormented by the fear that she may find a lover."

"Does she go out? I would that I could see her, even veiled."

"Yes, every day with Achmet and her nurse. And, Bey Effendi," and the Greek bent down and whispered in his ear: "You can see her if you will, unveiled."

"How?" asked Abul Abbas.

Leonidas went and looked into the next room, closed the door which opened on the staircase, and returned.

"Bey Effendi," he said, "this eunuch is to be bought. I have talked with

him and know. Doubtless the nurse could be bribed as well. Mukhtar is miserly and cruel, his people do not love him. The town is small and every day Feridah Hanoum walks out through the lower gate and along the river with these two and no one else. They meet no one but the peasants, who fear Mukhtar too much to interfere, and so the Pacha thinks it safe. The Persian is young and beautiful, and Achmet thinks that she would like a lover."

Abul Abbas threw himself back among the cushions and gazed at his servant as if he had been some evil jinn.

"Leonidas," he said, "you hate this Mukhtar Pacha, why?"

Instantly the Greek's manner changed. "Hate him," he said indifferently, "oh, no I only thought of something to amuse my master. Had the Pacha shown you hospitality, you could not have given his wife a thought, but as it is, you owe him nothing."

"No," said the Bey, whose hot young blood was stirred by the thought of the

adventure, "that is true; I owe him nothing. I will try and see the beautiful Feridah."

Leonidas, as if in search of something, left the room. Outside he sat down on the stairs and buried his face in his hands overcome by his emotions.

"I have not worked in vain," he thought. "The Albanian is wax in my hands. I will make him the instrument of my revenge."

The narrow walls of the Bosnian house seemed to open before him, and he saw the square of Megara swarming with Turkish soldiers and Greek peasants pale with fear. Two notorious Greek rebels had been found hidden in his father's inn, and the punishment was swift and sure. Once more he saw the Turkish Pacha, seated calm and unmoved on his Arabian horse, and heard him give his orders. The inn was fired. He saw the flames burst through the windows and flicker on the roof, but a sight still more terrible distracted his attention. His father was dragged

before the Pacha, a cord was placed around his neck, and he was strangled in the presence of his children, Leonidas and his sister, a beautiful girl of fifteen, who stood by, weeping in each other's arms.

And then brother and sister were separated, torn apart, their hands tied behind them, and each one lifted up behind a soldier on his horse. He could hear the Pacha say: "The boy shall go to Stamboul, the girl I will keep myself," and at that moment the thirst for vengeance had entered into his heart, and he had made a vow that if it cost his own life, he would be revenged on the man who had done all this. And he thanked heaven that he knew his name, Mukhtar Pacha!

He had never seen his sister again, but he had learned her fate. She had been betrothed to the son of a merchant in Athens, and he had tried to find and buy her back, but Mukhtar Pacha had kept her for himself. A year afterwards she had escaped, rejoined her betrothed, and they had fled to the

mountains. But Mukhtar had pursued and found them. They had been brought back, and were seen again no more. Mukhtar was cruel and unrelenting as the grave, and their fate was one of those mysteries about which it is better not to ask.

Through Mukhtar, his father had lost his life, his sister her honour, and he himself his liberty. The debt was heavy, and Leonidas sought to repay the Pacha in his own coin—death and dishonour. But to do so he needed all his art, never must he forget himself, and now he rose and re-entered his master's presence with a smile.

"Leonidas," said Abul Abbas, "at what hour does Mukhtar's wife walk by the river?"

"I will discover, Bey Effendi. You know your pleasure is my first consideration."

"Yes, you are a faithful servant."

"I do my best. There are but two things worthy of pursuit for a young prince, war and love. I fear that here

in Jaice my lord will pine in vain for adventures of the field of battle; wherefore the only amusement left for him is love."

Far into the night Leonidas was spinning his plans of vengeance as the spider spins his web, and when he fell asleep in the grey dawn, they were almost spun.

II

The next morning Abul Abbas rode down into the valley to his Spahis. As he passed the Governor's house he rode very slowly and looked up at the latticed windows. He saw nothing of course, but he hoped that the beautiful Persian was looking down at him. Arrived at the monastery he found the monks and his Spahis all in a bad humour, the result of their forced association.

His first effort was with the monks. He explained to them that the soldiers were quartered there by the orders of the Governor and through no desire of his, and his naturally gracious manner

and the gift of a few pieces of gold coin soon won over his unwilling hosts.

With the soldiers his task was even easier. He merely talked to them and told them the reception he had met with himself, and they forgot their own dissatisfaction.

As he rode back again and turned the corner of the Governor's house, a small door, doubtless that of the harem staircase, opened, and three figures came out, the negro and two women completely shrouded in black ferejehs and veils. The Albanian's heart beat fast as he drew rein to let them pass, but it was impossible to tell which was the beauty and which the nurse, and he rode on to his little house on the wall.

In the afternoon Leonidas paid a long visit to Achmet and returned with all the news, with which he entertained his master at supper. The eunuch had told him that his mistress had seen Abul Abbas in the street, and had confided in her nurse that she thought him very

handsome and was delighted with his Albanian costume.

Abul Abbas gave him a piece of gold for the eunuch, and one for the nurse, and Leonidas went again to the Governor's residence after supper, and soon returned with a piece of information which, to the Albanian, seemed very cheap at two pieces of gold. The beautiful Persian it seemed went every day to a certain secluded spot on the river to bathe. A small kiosk had been constructed there for her use, and this kiosk, the two servants decided, offered the possibility of a rendezvous.

Abul Abbas was really excited now, and imagined himself already in love with the beautiful Persian. Youth will love and must love as it can, and in the Orient *l'amour s'attrape par l'oreille.* The next day he met the veiled figures again in the street not once but twice, and both times they stopped and looked at him. Abul Abbas was in haste, and would have sent more gold to the Pacha's servants, but the Greek restrained him.

"You have shown them that you have money," he said, "and it is enough. Do not pay for what you want before, but afterwards."

The third day they met again, and that evening after supper, Leonidas informed his master that he thought the rendezvous might take place on the morrow. Abul Abbas was overjoyed. "But are you sure," he asked, "that Feridah Hanoum will receive me?"

"Yes," said Leonidas, "it is her wish. The eunuch and the nurse are ours, and everything is arranged. I think we are sure of success, but," he added carelessly, "of course we will risk our lives."

"Of course," replied Abul Abbas with a smile, "love has its perils as well as war, but in the danger lies the charm. After all it makes no difference, we all die when our time comes and not before."

The next morning Abul Abbas with Leonidas and two of his Spahis started out on horseback with guns over their shoulders as if in search of game.

For some distance up the river they rode, and a mile or more beyond the kiosk of Feridah Hanoum, the red roof of which, visible through the bushes, the Greek (who had carefully reconnoitred the spot) pointed out to his master. The rendezvous was to be at noon, and, having reached a village the Albanian and his suite dismounted, and ordering his soldiers to guard the horses and not to stir from the spot until his return, Abul Abbas, followed by his servant, struck off on foot up the side of the mountain to look for imaginary birds.

They ascended till they were lost to sight from the village among the trees, then walked in a straight line along the side of the mountain till they were opposite the kiosk, and then descending to within a few paces of the road, sat down among the underbrush to await the signal which had been agreed upon. Ten minutes perhaps elapsed, and then they saw above the bushes a white scarf, waved for a moment in the air.

Abul Abbas sprang to his feet and dashed down across the road and in among the bushes, his heart beating quickly with excitement, his cheeks flushed, and his eyes sparkling with anticipated pleasure. He was young and his blood ran through his veins like fire. The Greek followed him, and once well among the bushes, they saw a black hand beckoning from behind a willow tree, and in another moment met the eunuch in front of the kiosk. This was a small square wooden building with a latticed window and a narrow door.

Achmet led the Greek round to the other side nearest the river, and then returning took Abul Abbas by the hand, opened the door, and pushed him in shutting it again behind him, and standing guard outside. For a moment the Albanian, coming from the brilliant noonday could see nothing; but a woman whom he knew must be the nurse approached, and took him by the hand, and then the dusk seemed to clear up around him, and he looked and saw.

The fair Persian was seated on a bench over which had been thrown a Bosnian rug, and as Abul Abbas looked at her, he did not know which surprised him most, her beauty or her costume, for she wore the Persian dress. Feridah was white as alabaster with features of faultless beauty, black eyes like a gazelle, and coral lips which seemed made only to be kissed. Her hair, like waved black silk, was drawn up on her head and then let fall again in rippling masses to her waist. On her head she wore a small pink silk turban striped with gold, fastened on one side with a bunch of flowers made of gold wire and precious stones.

Her dress consisted of a tight-fitting bodice of purple satin embroidered in gold, cut out in front in a broad square, which revealed the snowy whiteness of her throat and bosom, and with tight sleeves which ended at the elbow, and showed her round white arms, circled with diamond bracelets, and her delicate hands loaded with rings. Her trousers

were of pink silk striped with gold, and so full that they hung like a skirt; but unlike the Turkish trousers which reach the ankle, they ended at the knee, and after the amazing custom of the Persian women, who only shoe themselves to go out, her feet and legs were bare.

Abul Abbas had spent his childhood in the Sultan's harem, and his youth was not absolutely that of an anchorite, but he felt as he looked at Feridah that he had never had such a revelation of beauty before. There is no precedent to guide the Oriental lover, but Abul Abbas trusted in God and in himself, and after gazing at the beautiful Persian for a moment in silence, he stepped forward, sank on one knee before her, and took and kissed her hand.

Feridah looked at him and smiled, and then speaking in Turkish with a foreign accent, invited him to sit beside her. He accepted the invitation and began to speak: "Hanoum," he said, "I can never thank you enough for your goodness in receiving me."

"No," replied the Persian calmly, "it is you who are good to come, for in doing so you run the greatest risk."

"Ah, Hanoum," said Abul Abbas, "the risk is nothing when the stake is Paradise."

The beautiful Feridah smiled. "You talk," she said, "like a Persian. The Turks do not value the flowers of language, and their only pride is to speak the truth."

Abul Abbas reflected that truth was not, at least in Turkey, an attribute ever ascribed to the Persians, but this lady seemed indeed entirely straightforward, and he contented himself with replying that he was by birth an Albanian.

"Everything," said Feridah, "which reminds me of my country fills me with delight. I am, and always will be, a stranger here."

Abul Abbas was more Turkish than the Turks. He knew the Turkish Empire was full of aliens brought there for the most part against their will. In the Serail itself nearly all were slaves or

captives like himself. But they all wore smiling faces and he, who thought Turkey the one country in the world and the Serail the centre around which everything revolved, supposed (if he thought of it at all) that they all considered their captivity as much their good fortune as he did his own. Now for the first time the sadness in Feridah's tone made him feel that one might love one's own country better than even the Ottoman Empire; but even then it was a feeling for which he sought an explanation.

"You do not love your husband," he said, "or his country would be yours."

"No," said Feridah, "I do not. Mukhtar Pacha is a man whom no woman could love. He is hard, cruel, and avaricious. It is true he loves me, at least with what he calls love, and tries to please me; but I have only to look around me to know what he really is. At my father's house in Teheran, we had many slaves, but they had been ours always, and loved us and considered

that they belonged to our family. Here there is not a woman in our harem who has been bought with money. Mukhtar has torn them all from their homes when they were old enough to remember, and the tales they tell of him and his atrocities make my blood run cold."

"Mukhtar is undoubtedly a hard and cruel man," said Abul Abbas, "but do not judge all Turks by him. I also am a prisoner of war, but I was adopted by the Sultan, and have found in my captivity a happy and brilliant life, which would never have been mine at home."

Feridah looked at him in wonder. "Then," she said, "you do not remember, you know nothing but the Serail. I think always of my home, our beautiful palace and garden, where I and my sisters were as happy as the days were long. Mukhtar came to Teheran; he heard of us and the Shah wishing to please him, ordered my father to give him one of his daughters. Two were already betrothed and the other was too young. I was the

victim. My only comfort was that I could bring with me my nurse. She loved me as her own child, and we talk always of our happy days in Teheran."

Abul Abbas began to realise that she sought his aid in escaping from her husband and returning to her own land; but he knew that his duty to the Sultan made such an undertaking impossible for him.

"Hanoum," he said, "I would gladly give my life for you, but I cannot take you back to Persia. All countries are alike when the sun shines on them and all alike when it is dark. Love was the sunshine of your happiness at home! With another love, that love you have not known, you will be more happy here."

He spoke so passionately that Feridah realised in her turn why he had come to her.

"Another love," she said, "yes, if I could have that."

"It is yours already," cried the Albanian falling on one knee before her,

and taking both her hands. "Feridah, no man could see you and not love you. I lay my heart at your feet."

Feridah flushed with more than pleasure. The Albanian was young, handsome, and full of fire, and he was her first lover. She did not answer, but she leant forward, and the next instant she was in his arms, and they had given each other their first kiss. The nurse sat stoically in the corner; she had not learned Turkish, and could not follow the conversation; but she knew that all love scenes are alike.

Presently there was a knock at the door. It was Achmet giving the signal which Mahaferid repeated to her mistress, that it was time for the Bey to withdraw.

A few minutes after, the Albanian and the Greek were once more in ambush on the mountain side, and Abul Abbas watched with a beating heart the three figures emerge from the bushes, and knew by the graceful carriage only, that the one who walked in the middle and

wore yellow boots was the beautiful Persian, the woman he now loved. He said nothing, but the Greek read him like a book, and all the way back along the mountain, congratulated himself on the success of his enterprise. When they reached the village, they complained at not finding any game, and, to avoid suspicion, remounted their horses and rode farther up the valley.

Abul Abbas forced himself to be calm and seem indifferent, but his heart was filled with a wild and sudden joy which made him long to shout and sing. It was his first real love adventure. The sun was setting as they re-entered Jaice. As they rode past the Governor's house, Abul Abbas looked up at the windows, and though he saw nothing, he felt that the beautiful Feridah was watching for and looking down at him.

That evening at supper he was very gay, and talked a great deal with Leonidas, urging the Greek to work for him and hasten the consummation of his desires. Leonidas needed no urging,

as indeed he was working for himself, but he had no idea of spoiling his plans by undue haste, and explained to his master that their motto must be *Festina lente.*

III

Mukhtar Pacha had not returned the visit of Abul Abbas, but, acting on the advice of his servant, the Albanian ignored this inattention, and went to visit him again the next morning.

The Pacha again received him coldly, but Abul Abbas, who had come for a purpose, overlooked this, and, as instructed by Leonidas, discoursed with great animation on the pleasures of shooting in the mountains, and declared that, as far as his military duties (which were nothing) would permit, he meant to give himself up to the invigorating sport. Mukhtar fell into the trap as the Greek intended, considered the Albanian well disposed of, and troubled himself about him no more.

Abul Abbas spent the afternoon at the monastery with the monks and Spahis, but time dragged; he was impatient to see Feridah again, and after supper sent Leonidas to arrange another interview. The answer was favourable, Achmet promising in the name of his lady another interview at the kiosk on the river.

Everything seemed to be going well, almost too well. Abul Abbas himself was struck by the ease with which things arranged themselves. It seemed strange, as he remarked to Leonidas, that a man so jealous as Mukhtar Pacha would allow his wife to go out with only two attendants or to bathe in the river at all.

These reflections on the part of his master convinced the Greek that he had not lost his head as well as his heart. He congratulated himself on the discovery, and explained the situation by saying that the Pacha had absolute confidence in Achmet, and was reassured on the score of Abul Abbas on finding him absorbed in the chase.

To carry out the latter illusion, the Albanian and the Greek started out the next morning with guns and game-bags, but this time leaving the Spahis behind. They rode up the valley and left their horses at the village as before, and again struck up the mountain, made their way through the bushes, and waited for the signal as before.

Again the white cloth was waved and again Abul Abbas flew to his lady on the wings of love. An Oriental wooing goes quickly. The ice had been well broken on the first occasion, and this time they met as lovers. Abul Abbas took Feridah in his arms, and she clasped hers around his neck and gave him back his kisses. Mahaferid, the nurse, sat and looked on apparently without emotion, but really with entire satisfaction, for she loved and sympathised with her nursling, and, knowing her to be unhappy with her husband, was glad that she had found a lover.

To-day there was more light in the kiosk, for a tile had fallen off the roof,

and a long sunbeam shot in like a golden arrow. Abul Abbas gazed at Feridah, and she at him. Their conversation, like that of most lovers, would look inconsequential if printed, but to them it was of significance, and they were perfectly happy holding each other's hands, and looking into each other's eyes.

The Albanian indeed wished for something more, and urged her to fly with him. But she answered simply: "Where? Where beyond the power of Mukhtar? You say you cannot take me back to Persia, and in Turkey he would find us. It is already a great deal that we can meet thus, and we must be satisfied."

Then she asked him if he was not named after the first Khalif of the Abbassids, and showed him that she knew some history, for she could read and write. She complained that the name was long and that she would have one for him all her own, saying that she would call him by the Khalif's other name, Safar. Abul Abbas knew the significance of this name was bad, but

she knew no Arabic, and only that it was sweet to the ear, so he accepted it, and henceforth she called him always Safar.

This time he lingered with her longer than the last, and Achmet repeated his summons several times before he tore himself away. Then, for greater caution, he and the Greek pursued their hunt into the mountains, and not till evening did they return to Jaice.

The next day Abul Abbas perforce went hunting. In the Serail he had been taught the art of war, but he knew nothing of sport, and found it trivial and uninteresting. But hunt he must, and he began to realise that he who lives a deception walks no easy road.

That evening Achmet came in great excitement to visit Leonidas and when he had left, the Greek informed his master that Mukhtar Pacha was going on a three days' hunting trip, and that he considered this would be their great opportunity, provided the Pacha did not spoil everything by inviting Abul Abbas to go with him. Achmet had also

brought the promise of another rendezvous for the next morning, and Leonidas instructed Abul Abbas to make use of this to persuade the beautiful Persian to come and sup with him at his house on the first evening of the Pacha's departure.

The Albanian was charmed with this plan if it could only be carried out, commended the Greek warmly for his devotion, and gave him three pieces of gold. Little did he know that his servant was working, not for him, but for himself, and that in this affair, which progressed as if by magic, he was the slave and Leonidas the master.

The next day Abul Abbas met Feridah at the bathing kiosk for the third time. When they were seated side by side, he asked her when Mukhtar Pacha would start on his hunting expedition. Feridah replied that he would start the next afternoon, and that the party would last three days, whereupon the Albanian, with all the abruptness of an impatient passion, asked her to come and

sup with him the next evening at his house.

Feridah was startled, and declared that it would be impossible, but Abul Abbas explained to her his, or rather his servant's, plan. Leonidas would procure the dress of a Bosnian peasant woman, and send it to her by Achmet. As soon as it was dark, she would put it on, and Achmet would let her out of the harem entrance. The Greek would be waiting for her in the street and conduct her to the little house on the wall, and if any one met them, she would pass for a peasant woman with whom the Bey's servant had made a chance acquaintance.

Feridah thought the plan a good one.

"But Safar," she said, "I cannot come alone."

"Achmet cannot accompany you. He might be recognised, and all would be lost. My servant will guard you as he would his life."

"But Safar," she said, "Mahaferid must come with me; let your servant

bring a dress for her also. I cannot come to you alone."

"Feridah," said the Albanian, "do you not love me?"

"Yes, Safar," she said, and she put her hand in his.

"Then come to me alone."

She did not answer, and he would not urge her further, but left it to herself. But at their parting, when he held her in his arms, he said, "Feridah, I will send two dresses, but I will hope that there will be need of only one."

Still she did not answer, but she looked at him and kissed him with all the love that he desired.

The next day Abul Abbas, for the sake of appearances and much against his will, went out hunting again. But this time his penance was not too long, for at three o'clock as he sat with his servant on the side of the mountain, well concealed and thinking of far other game than birds, he had the pleasure of seeing the Pacha riding up the valley followed by quite a numerous train,

equipped with all the weapons and accessories of the chase.

Hardly were they out of sight when the impatient lover descended from his perch and, followed by his servant, returned with incredible speed to Jaice. There the little house was in a bustle in which the two hunters at once took their part. Assaf had, in the early morning, scoured the town and returned triumphant, laden with the spoils of forest and stream, to say nothing of the gifts of the garden, vegetables, fruit, and flowers. A sumptuous supper was therefore now in preparation.

The flowers were lying together in a heap, and Abul Abbas, who had never in his life attempted such a thing, took them and twined them into garlands and hung them round the white walls of his three living rooms. Quantities of candles were arranged wherever place could be found for them, and as it grew dark, the Greek lit them, and went to fetch Feridah. Abul Abbas had arrayed himself in his greatest splendour of crim-

son and gold. He wore his whitest kilt and all his jewels, and now waited with impatience, asking himself over and over again the great question whether or not Feridah would come to him alone.

A short time passed, and then he heard the house door open and close again and a step on the stair, but one, it seemed, that of Leonidas. The door opened, and the Greek entered, and behind him a Bosnian peasant woman, whose step had made no sound because her feet were bare.

Abul Abbas looked at her for an instant in silence. The Bosnian dress is graceful and becoming. She wore a white linen skirt and tunic, and a short sleeveless vest, which was of crimson velvet embroidered in gold, cut heart-shaped in the neck. Wide, white sleeves showed her white arms inside, and on her head she wore a gold embroidered cap from which fell a spangled veil.

Leonidas, with a deep bow, withdrew and closed the door behind him. Feridah looked at the Albanian Prince and

smiled, and in one step he was beside her, and held her in his arms.

"Feridah," he said, "you have come, you have come as I asked you; you love me?"

"Yes, Safar," she answered, and her look was a complete surrender. "I love you, and I have come alone."

Half an hour later Leonidas returned with the first course of the supper on a round brass tray, and found the lovers sitting together on the divan in the room which overlooked the waterfall, amid the splendour of candles and flowers.

Course after course he carried in and out, and finally when he brought the coffee and bon-bons, it was nine o'clock. Then as he retreated he beckoned to his master, and Abul Abbas followed him into the next room. There he whispered in his ear that all was well, and that he would keep guard, and come just before the dawn and take the lady home.

Abul Abbas told him that he was the best and most faithful of servants, and gave him a gold piece and he retired,

carefully shutting the door. The lovers were alone and in Paradise.

IV

Mukhtar Pacha had stopped for the night at a village which was a three hours' ride from Jaice. He had taken up his quarters in the house of a rich peasant, and midnight found him peacefully asleep.

The whole village slumbered, including the guards on duty at the door, till suddenly the silence was broken by the sound of horses' hoofs at full gallop on the road, and the sentinels were reluctantly awakened by a voice that called loudly for Mukhtar Pacha. The Pacha was a soldier, and the Turkish Empire ever in a state of war, so that the guards awoke his body servant, who did not hesitate to rouse his master. Mukhtar was soon awake, and the stranger, who wore the dress of a Franciscan monk, was admitted to his presence.

"Who are you?" asked the Pacha,

looking at his visitor, "and what do you seek that deserves to break my rest?"

The monk threw back his cowl, and showed a dark tragic face framed in a wild black beard and bushy hair.

"I have come," he said, "to warn you to return to Jaice at once; your honour has been betrayed."

"What do you mean?" cried Mukhtar fiercely, seizing the sword which lay beside him.

"What I say," replied the monk; "you have a young wife, a Persian whom you love, but who has never loved you in return. Go home and look for her in your harem; you will not find her. She is in the arms of her lover."

The last words were pronounced with a terrible emphasis. The Pacha was a brave man, but there was something about this strange midnight visitor that chilled his blood.

"Who," he asked, "is her lover?"

"The Albanian Prince who is known as Abul Abbas Bey."

Mukhtar sprang to his feet like a tiger. "How do you know this?" he asked.

"I know everything," replied the monk. "I have the gift of second sight."

Mukhtar sank back on the divan again. Like most Orientals he was very superstitious. And the monk continued: "Return with me, I will guide you; you will find her in his arms."

The Pacha tried to look at him steadily.

"Why have you come to me?" he asked. "You are a monk and a Christian; I, a Turkish Pacha. What is this to you?"

"I have made it," replied the monk, "my mission to punish sin."

Again his tone was terrible.

"Give me then," said the Pacha, "a proof of your second sight?"

"I will," replied the monk. "You were born at Broussa at the feast of Bairam at the third hour of the third day. You have a blue mark on your left shoulder.

Your second son has inherited it. Your career has been brilliant and successful. At twenty-eight you were made a Pacha, and sent as Governor to Athens. You had one wife, Velie Hanoum. She loved you, and though you had many slaves, none of whom you bought with money, she was jealous of but one, a Greek girl named Ianthe. She was the daughter of an innkeeper at Megara, whose inn you burned and whom you had bowstrung in his daughter's presence. The girl resented it. She ran away from you with a young man to whom she was betrothed. You caught and brought them back, the girl——"

"I hung up by her thumbs. She was strong and lived two days."

"A good punishment," said the monk calmly. "After that Velie Hanoum was no more jealous, but she died ere long, leaving you four fine children. You went to Persia and brought back the beautiful Feridah. She is as white as snow, with eyes like a gazelle, and goes barefooted. You give her too much

liberty. She goes every day to bathe in the river, and three times she has met the Albanian there. Do you believe that I know everything, or shall I tell you more?"

"Yes," replied the Pacha, "I believe you do. What is your advice?"

"Return with me to Jaice at once. I have a key which opens every door and will admit you to the Albanian's house. It is unguarded. He has sent his servants out of the way, and you will find him and your wife alone."

Mukhtar writhed under these last words. The monk looked at him and saw that he loved his wife and what he suffered; and a strange smile flitted across his face.

"We must start at once," he continued, "or we will come too late. Order me a fresh horse; I have already ridden far and mine is jaded."

His tone was one of command, which the Pacha would not have brooked at any other time; but it seemed as if this stranger wielded a mesmeric influence

over him which it was impossible to resist.

"How many men shall I take with us?" asked the Pacha.

"None," replied the monk firmly; "you will take your sword, and I will carry your pistols, that I may hand them to you at the right moment. You will find the Albanian not only alone, but unarmed and asleep. It will be a most unequal contest, and to make it more would be unworthy a man as brave as Mukhtar Pacha."

"You are right," replied the Pacha, whose will bent entirely to the monk's; "but tell me one thing more: you wish the death of the Albanian, and why?"

"Because he was baptised a Christian, and is a renegade. I have already told you that my mission is the punishment of sin."

The Pacha was satisfied, called his servants, and ordered that two of his fastest horses should be saddled at once. The man to whom the command was given wondered, but dared ask no ques-

tions and retired. Mukhtar made ready, fastened on his sword, and gave the monk a pair of loaded pistols, which the latter stuck carelessly in the cord around his waist. Then they descended the stairs, mounted their horses, and, to the amazement of the guards and the servant, rode away into the night.

The way was long and when Mukhtar Pacha knocked with his sword hilt on the gate of Jaice, the dawn already glimmered in the east. The sentinel opened the wicket, and looked out, and then, seeing the Governor attended only by a strange monk, asked no questions, but threw open half the gate. The two wayfarers rode into the town with a clatter of hoofs upon the stones, which sounded strangely loud at this still hour —too loud for safety; and the monk whispered to the Pacha to dismount and leave their horses with the sentinel. Mukhtar obeyed without a word, and the two proceeded through the narrow streets on foot.

All the long way the monk had talked

to him and told him of himself and his own past, till the Pacha was filled with supernatural awe of this strange being, and gave himself unto him entirely.

When they reached the Albanian's house, the monk drew from his breast a key, and opening the door, they both silently entered. A light burned in the corridor and at the foot of the staircase. The monk pointed to something. The Pacha looked, and saw a pair of yellow morocco boots embroidered round the top in silver.

Perhaps all along he had hoped to be mistaken; he must have hoped. The monk, looking at him, saw how he shut his eyes and leant for an instant against the wall. "Your wife's boots," he said calmly; "follow me," and he began to mount the stairs.

The Pacha followed, but his step was slow, and his proud head drooped as it had never done before. He had robbed others of their honour, and thought nothing of it. He had taken young girls from their parents, wives from their

husbands — now his own turn had come.

They entered the first room and saw in the pale light which glimmered through the lattices the burnt out candles and the drooping garlands of faded flowers. In the second room a lantern burned, and here the monk stopped and pointed to an embroidered cap and jacket which lay on the divan beside a spangled veil. "She came," he said, "in the dress of a Bosnian peasant."

The door to the third room was closed. The monk stopped and knocked once, twice, three times. Then a step was heard inside, some one drew back the bolt, and retreated. The monk opened the door, and the next instant he and the Pacha were in the room. A red glass lantern hung from the ceiling in which a light still flickered, and through the lattice which hung out over the cataract came the first glow of morning.

On the edge of the divan in a green Turkish caftan sat Abul Abbas only

half awake, and behind him, in her white Bosnian dress, lay Feridah, still asleep. The coffee cups and the bon-bons still stood on the little table, and around the walls hung the burnt out candles and the faded flowers.

"Dog," cried the Pacha, "false Moslem, Christian renegade! Your life shall be the price of my honour!"

The loud words roused the Albanian fully; he sprang to his feet, and looked about him for a weapon, but in vain. At the same instant Feridah awoke and sat up among the cushions, with a cry of terror.

The Pacha half drew his sword, and then, convinced that the Albanian was unarmed, let it fall back in its sheath and, turning to the monk, asked for a pistol. The monk drew one from his belt, cocked it, and levelled it *straight at the Pacha.* Mukhtar, surprised, stepped back towards the window, and once more drew his sword, and the Albanian, with the generous impulse of his nature, started forward as if to interfere.

"Stand aside Abul Abbas," cried the monk, "this hour is mine."

The Albanian knew the voice, but not the tone. Could it be that the lips which had addressed him only as Bey Effendi, could utter such an imperious command?

But he obeyed, for after all he was unarmed, and the Pacha had his sword. He sat down again on the divan, and Feridah in silent terror crept close behind him, and clasped her arms around his neck, and thus they both watched the scene. The strange monk kept his eyes fixed upon the Pacha, and his gaze seemed to charm him as a snake charms a bird.

"Mukhtar Pacha," he said, "you do not know me, but I will tell you who I am." Holding the pistol always levelled at the Pacha's breast, with his left hand he tore off his false hair and beard, and threw them on the floor. "I am a Greek, Leonidas, the son of the innkeeper of Megara, whom you had bowstrung in my presence, then a child. I am the brother of Ianthe!"

Here the Pacha gasped for breath, and leant back against the window.

"You sold me as a slave and as a slave I have lived, lived with one purpose, vengeance on you who took my liberty, my father's life, my sister's honour. I have tracked you, learned your secrets, waited for the time when I could pay you back in your own coin—death and dishonour.

"Mukhtar Pacha, my hour has come at last. You have robbed others of their honour without remorse; now you know what it is to lose your own. Look at your wife and feel what you have made others suffer."

Mukhtar's eyes turned for a moment to Feridah, the woman whom he loved, Feridah with her arms around her lover's neck. Then, as if he could not bear the sight, he looked once more straight at the Greek, and again seemed to submit entirely to his strange, fatal fascination.

"Mukhtar Pacha," Leonidas went on, "I have thrown your wife into my master's arms for my own vengeance. I

alone have wrought your dishonour. Now, one thing more, and then my debt is paid—Death! I regret only that it must be so short."

His eye glanced along the polished barrel of the pistol, taking a cool and steady aim.. Then he paused as if to enjoy to the full the moment for which he had waited and worked so long.

In that moment vengeance was taken out of his hands. The Pacha, with an involuntary movement, for he was brave and had faced death a hundred times, fell back against the lattice. The wood was old and rotted by the constant spray which dashed against it; for a moment it sustained his weight, and then gave way. Mukhtar fell backwards out of the window, over the city wall, down into the cataract!

Leonidas rushed to the window and leant out. The sun was rising, and the whole valley flushed with a rosy light. The Verbas, as ever, thundered over the precipice and dashed its spray like pearls high in the air; but nothing,

nothing more was to be seen. Mukhtar Pacha had escaped all earthly vengeance, and fallen into the hands of God.

The Greek turned back again and saw Feridah overcome by emotion weeping in Abul Abbas's arms. Quickly he tore off his monk's gown, and casting it aside threw himself on his knees beside the divan, and, seizing his master's hand, covered it with kisses.

"Bey Effendi," he said, "you have helped me to my revenge!"

V

The drama was over; the avenger had played his part, and once more he was the good servant of his master. Half an hour later he conducted through the streets a Bosnian woman, who knocked and was admitted at the harem entrance of the Governor's house. Returning he roused the cook and scullion, and gave orders for his master's breakfast; mounted the stairs and took down the candle ends and flowers, and threw

them out of the window after the Pacha, with his monk's gown, and the remnants of the broken lattice.

The sun was up, and nothing remained of last night's love scene, or the dawn's catastrophe. No one knew of Mukhtar's visit; and Leonidas, his master, and everything in the house appeared the same as always.

The Pacha was of course missed by his people in the morning, and the strange tale told by his servants of the unknown monk, who had come at midnight, and with whom he had gone away alone, furnished no clue, but only added to the mystery. There was no one to take command, and after some confusion, it was decided that his attendants should remain where they were, two only being sent to carry the news to Jaice.

At noon some monks who were fishing in the river just below their monastery saw a corpse floating down the stream. With rods and poles they managed to pull it ashore and discovered, instead of that of some unknown peas-

ant, the body of the Governor of Bosnia. Not knowing what to do, they carried it to the monastery, where the abbot ordered it laid in the entrance hall, and sent two messengers to bear the news to the town. Their way, though steep, was short, and they and those who came to look for him met in front of what had been yesterday the Governor's residence.

Sic transit gloria mundi!

The Pacha's death was a mystery which none could fathom. The news spread rapidly through the town, and the citizens began to assemble in the principal street. The story of the strange monk who had decoyed the Pacha away in the night was discredited by many, and the one fact remained that his body had been found floating in the river.

Confusion, threatening to break into disorder, reigned and again there seemed no one to take command. But just at the right moment, Abul Abbas Bey, followed by his servant and acting

entirely under his direction, appeared upon the scene. He was arrayed in his most gorgeous Albanian costume, with a splendour of gold, sables, and jewels, which dazzled and impressed the crowd. They all knew he was a Prince, and in the Orient, the hour belongs to him who knows how to seize and use it.

In a short speech, in which he had been carefully instructed by Leonidas, he explained to the citizens that he was the adopted brother of the Sultan, and had been sent to Bosnia to assist the Governor in council and in arms; and that now, owing to the sudden and mysterious death of the Pacha, it became his duty to take command of the affairs of state, and to fill the vacant place until such time as the pleasure of the Sultan could be known. Whereupon, as no one took it upon himself to raise a dissenting voice, the matter was considered settled, and the Albanian Prince, entering the house and the audience chamber, took the Pacha's empty seat on the divan.

The secretaries and other officials were called. Abul Abbas dictated the dispatches to the Sultan, attended to some other small official matters, and then laying the responsibility of the widow and her household upon Achmet's shoulders, and warning him that he would answer for them with his head, he returned to his own house.

In the afternoon, the body of the Pacha was carried in solemn procession from the monastery to his late residence. The next day the funeral took place with all the pomp and ceremony which could be managed in the little Bosnian town, and Abul Abbas Bey, the new Governor, *ad interim*, walked as chief mourner in the funeral train.

The next day the official inquiry into the death of the Pacha was begun, Abul Abbas conducting the investigation (always under the guidance of Leonidas). There were four witnesses, the Pacha's servant and two guards who had seen him leave his hunting quarters with the monk, and the sentinel who had admit-

ted him, still attended by the same strange companion, into the town of Jaice.

The Pacha's body had borne no mark of any weapon, but was bruised and battered from being knocked against the rocks, and it seemed probable that he had fallen from the city wall into the cataract. No one could be found who had ever seen or heard of the strange monk before. His gown was found floating down the river, but he was not in it, and there all evidence and testimony ended. Murder will come to light, but Mukhtar Pacha had not been murdered, but simply overtaken by the vengeance of Heaven and his death remained a mystery.

There was but little mourning in the Pacha's household. Feridah, after the first horror of the shock, found herself more happy than she had ever hoped to be at being thus liberated from a chain which she had found so heavy. And the slaves, poor flowers, plucked from their own lands by the ruthless

hand of Mukhtar, began to dream once more of home and liberty.

Feridah had told her nurse all that had happened, but the good woman was not merely discreet, she could speak no language but Persian, and thus for two good reasons the secret went no farther. Achmet was left in entire ignorance of what had occurred, and devoted himself to the interests of Abul Abbas and Leonidas, which he now believed to be his own.

The forty days of mourning which Feridah was obliged to observe prevented her leaving the house so that it was impossible for her to meet her lover in the kiosk, but every day Achmet carried back and forth the love letters which they wrote each other.

Abul Abbas had written a private letter to the Sultan, in which he had told him the whole story of his amours, confessed that he had broken the law of Islam, and begged his imperial foster brother to consent to his marriage with Feridah. With impatience he awaited

the Sultan's answer, but the way from Jaice to Constantinople was long and difficult, and it was not till late September, four weeks after the death of Mukhtar, that the messenger returned. But when he came at last, the hopes of the Albanian were more than fulfilled. The Sultan not only consented to his marriage with the widow of Mukhtar Pacha, but appointed him his successor as Governor of Bosnia. It seemed one of those rare turns in life when there is nothing more to be desired.

With the messenger returned the oldest son of Mukhtar to arrange and settle up his father's temporal affairs. The Pacha having died without a will, his property was distributed according to the Turkish law, which gives one eighth to the widow, and of the remainder, two portions to each son, one to each daughter.

The young man proposed to Feridah to take everything then in Bosnia, including all the slaves. This proposition she accepted gladly, for it was her

desire to restore to liberty the Greek and Albanian girls who had composed the harem of her late Lord. They were all Christians, and as such Leonidas, without whose advice nothing was any longer undertaken, was admitted to their presence to assist them in deciding about their fate. Among them he found one whom he had known in childhood, at home in Megara, and as she was willing to link her life with his, he asked and received her from her mistress, and their marriage was celebrated at the Church of the Monastery in the valley. Of the others, such as wished it were returned, as the occasion offered, to their homes, and the others, who had grown fond of their captivity, remained.

Every one found it natural and right that Abul Abbas Bey should marry Feridah Hanoum. The wedding was accordingly fixed to take place three weeks later. In the meantime, as Jaice was only the summer residence of the Governor, and it began to grow chilly in the mountains, the whole party

removed to the larger and more commodious town of Sarajevo, the real capital of Bosnia. And there, on the fourteenth day of October, was celebrated with all the splendour, so dear to the Oriental heart, the marriage of Abul Abbas and Feridah.

And Leonidas? The vengeance for which he had lived and worked and waited was now accŏmplished, and he was satisfied. Abul Abbas had given him his liberty, and Feridah had presented him his Greek wife. But he thought no more of Megara, and cast in his lot for ever with that of the Albanian, being wise enough to see that there are few positions better than to be the servant of an obedient and powerful master. His influence was indeed absolute with Abul Abbas, who was a soldier, but not a statesman, and until the return of the latter to Constantinople in 1826, after the overthrow and annihilation of the Janissaries, Leonidas the Greek was the real Governor of Bosnia.

The Sweet Waters of Asia

THE SWEET WATERS OF ASIA

A Modern Turkish Tale

IT was a glorious May day on the Bosphorus. The water glittered in the sunlight, pale blue and silver, stirred by the wheels of steamboats and the countless oars of innumerable caiques into dazzling and endless reflections like a pavement of restless jewels.

Pera and its endless suburbs spread along the European shore, its white palaces bathing their terraces in the shining water, its gardens climbing the hills behind, and ending its long vista with the grey and frowning towers of Roumeli Hissar. And on the Asiatic shore—oh! scene of enchantment, which no pen can describe!—the Anatolian hills, pink and purple and yellow with their glory of flowers; the country houses

laden with wisteria, the orchards in blossom, and the clusters of deep pink Judas trees; the picturesque villages, and the summer palaces of Beys and Pachas embowered in gardens and nestling close to the water's edge, and all ending just as on the other side with the old Castle of Anatoli Hissar. And beyond, the Black Sea.

Close beside the village of Tchingeltchin stood the country house of Ezzid Pacha: in front a garden, then the Salamlik, and then, connected by a covered passage and surrounded by its high-walled garden, the real palace—the harem.

Ezzid Pacha was old and belonged to the conservative party, but his only son leaned toward the new ideas and, being in the Diplomatic Corps, had been away long years from home, and was now Ambassador in Rome. Ezzid Pacha's three daughters had long since married, and had gone with their husbands to different parts of the Turkish Empire, and the only child of his race,

whom he and his wife, Adilah Hanoum, still guarded with them, was their son's daughter, the little Mihri Hanoum. The Pacha loved a large household in the old style, and there were many slaves in the harem, besides two widows, poor cousins, for whom he provided and who served as maids of honour for Adilah Hanoum.

The only addition to the household whom he did not like was the French governess, whom Rechad Bey, his son, had sent, four years before, to educate his daughter. Her presence, Ezzid Pacha resented unceasingly, and sought to put difficulties in her way by obliging her to conform to all Turkish rules. Never was she allowed to leave the house, except like a Turkish woman in yashmak and ferejeh.

But the time of deliverance was at hand, for Mihri had reached her sixteenth year, and her marriage was the next event on the tapis. Like many Turkish girls, she had been betrothed from infancy to the grandson of a friend

of Ezzid Pacha's (another Pacha, rich and influential), and the consummation of the nuptials only waited the return of the young man from Vienna, where he was studying in one of the military schools.

The harem palace was a large square building, two stories high, with a wing running towards the hills. A central hall, dignified by the usual imposing Turkish staircase, and surmounted by a dome of coloured glass, was surrounded on each floor by a circle of large airy rooms, furnished and decorated in Oriental style. In a room on the ground floor, whose walls ran straight down into the water, and where one could fish from the window with ease, Mihri Hanoum was sitting with her suite, idle and happy, after the manner of their race.

The French woman only was busy with her embroidery, or moderately busy, for she turned constantly and looked through the window lattice, as if always expecting something which never came.

She was a thin brown woman of forty perhaps, who had been pretty, and looked as if she might have had a history.

On the floor sat Mihri's nurse, a negress of middle age named Hosnah, whose black eyes and white teeth shone with smiles of constant good humour, and who was dressed in a combination of the brightest colours, and loaded with gaudy trinkets and earrings and bracelets of massive gold. On the crimson divan sat Mihri herself, one foot hanging over the edge with her gold-embroidered slipper half off, and the other doubled under her in a true Oriental attitude; and beside her a Circassian girl named Ikbal, who had been brought in infancy to be her companion, and from whom she was inseparable.

Mihri was the ideal of Turkish beauty, well rounded, dimpled, and graceful as a faun. Her complexion was like cream and roses, her lips were full and red as a pomegranate blossom, and her teeth like pearls. Her face was, perhaps, a little round and her nose a little flat, but

both were in accordance with her type. Hair like black silk curled on her forehead and hung in two thick plaits below her waist. Her eyebrows looked as if they were painted with Indian ink, and her black lashes shaded long, black, velvet eyes, such as are found only in the Orient. She was dressed in a long pelisse of crimson velvet open at the neck, and embroidered in seed pearls, bracelets of different coloured stones encircled her arms, bare to the elbow, and around her neck hung a long string of pearls.

Ikbal was a real Circassian, red and white, with blue eyes and masses of red-golden hair, a peasant of the mountains with the beauty of youth and health; but no one could look at the two young girls and hesitate as to which one was the princess and which the slave. She was dressed in bright lilac and wore gold bracelets and a long string of amber beads. The colour effect of the whole group was most brilliant and Oriental.

The two young girls were excited at

something which the negress had just related, and which she now repeated with great effect.

"Yes, I heard it myself. The Pacha Effendi said to Adilah Hanoum, 'Murad Bey has returned from Vienna.'"

"Then," cried Ikbal, "Mihri will be married soon. I wish I could be married too, but I could not leave you, Mihri, and I would rather wait and see how you like being married, first."

"I wonder," said Mihri, "what he is like."

"Murad Bey," said Hosnah,—"oh! he is a handsome young man."

"You do not know, nurse," said Mihri; "you only say so because you think he ought to be."

"Oh," said Ikbal, "suppose he was cross-eyed or had a hook nose."

"Hush, Ikbal, how can you say such things!"

"Perhaps," said the governess, "the Pacha will arrange that you can see him from the window."

"Grandfather is so strict!" sighed

Mihri. "How delightful it must be in France where one can not only see, but talk with, one's *fiancé!*"

"Do not envy our customs," said Mademoiselle; "we have much to suffer that you are spared."

"And what?" asked Ikbal. "If I could go to balls and dance with young men and have them make love to me, I would not care what I had to suffer."

"Ikbal!" exclaimed Hosnah, indignantly, "such words are not fit for Mihri Hanoum to hear. If you say anything more I will tell the Hanoum Effendi. You are a disgrace to the harem of a Pacha."

But Ikbal only threw herself back on the divan and laughed; nobody was afraid of Hosnah's threats.

"I would like to see him," repeated Mihri, "and why not? I know it is the privilege of other girls."

"We must see him," said Ikbal, "and we will."

Mademoiselle looked out of the window again.

"You will see him on your wedding night," she said, "and after that, for all the rest of your life. And you will love him because you know no one else, and there can be none before or after him. In France there are—lovers: men who seek young girls out and love them for a while and then leave them and never come back!"

"Oh well," said Ikbal, "if I had a lover at all, I would take my chances."

There was a silence, and then Mihri asked her governess if they were not going out that afternoon.

"Surely," said Mademoiselle; "the Hanoum Effendi wishes us to go out every afternoon now that we are in the country."

"Where shall we go?" cried Ikbal; "across to Dolma Batche?"

"No," replied Mihri, "we will go to the place I love best, and where we have not been since last summer,—the Sweet Waters of Asia."

An hour later Mihri Hanoum and her suite were on their way up the

Bosphorus in a caique with two rowers and an elderly Armenian servant, who always accompanied them, seated in the bow. Mademoiselle and the nurse were wrapped in black silk ferejehs, but the young girls, according to the Turkish custom, wore theirs bright coloured.—Mihri's pink and Ikbal's blue. All wore the yashmak, which consists of a white gauze turban over an embroidered cap, and a veil beginning below the eyes,—a veil so transparent that, instead of hiding, it only enhances, the beauty of the wearer, and thus fails entirely in the purpose for which it was ordained by the Prophet.

The caique was rowed swiftly up the Bosphorus till it reached that little palace whose doors are all of fluted green grass, and whose marble staircase flows from it like a frozen cascade. Here they went more slowly, and the young girls looked with lively interest to see if there were any other picnickers like themselves, for in May the Sweet Waters of Europe are still the fashiona-

ble resort, and it was not yet the season for the Sweet Waters of Asia.

The boat stopped at that delicious lawn, shaded with splendid trees and ornamented with that exquisite fountain, than which Turkish art has no finer work to show. The ladies went on shore and strolled about under the trees a bit. But there was no one here except the man who sells bright-coloured cakes at a stall, a shepherd followed by a flock of milk-white sheep, and two or three idlers of the lower classes, so that they soon returned to the boat, and, turning from the Bosphorus, rowed into that winding stream, the Sweet Waters of Asia.

The place seemed deserted. The caique glided between the banks luxuriant and wild with tangled green. Overhead the willows leaned, and in many places met, so that one caught only glimmerings of the sky between, and the light itself was green. Mihri and Ikbal chattered gaily, but suddenly Mademoiselle held up a warning finger, and

another caique came swiftly up behind them, and, suddenly slackening its speed, floated along side by side with theirs.

In it, beside the rowers, sat two young Turkish officers, resplendent in their uniforms of black and gold, to which a dash of colour was added by their red fezes. One of them was pale and insignificant, the sort of man one does not look at twice; but the other, on whom the eyes of both young girls were at once riveted, was a real Prince of the Arabian Nights. He was the very embodiment of the Turkish ideal of masculine beauty: fine, clear-cut features, a complexion of that golden hue which one finds sometimes in Italy, but only at perfection in the Orient; the red blood flushing in the cheeks, and crimson on the lips; jet black hair and brows, a small lightly curled moustache, and eyes as long and black and bright as Mihri's own.

The unknown returned the young girl's gaze. Caught by Ikbal's bright hair, his eyes rested first on her, but only for a moment, then turned to Mihri

and lingered on her as if spellbound. Mihri at first returned his look with pleasure, but it grew too intense and, blushing, she looked down. Still feeling his eyes upon her, she turned away and, leaning over the side of the caique, looked down into the water. The Armenian motioned to the rowers to go faster, and the caique shot around a turning in the little river.

"What a beauty!" whispered Ikbal in Mihri's ear. "If Murad Bey could only be like that."

Mihri did not answer, but, looking up, she saw the strange caique again beside them, and the young officer's eyes again fastened upon her. And being a woman, Mihri once more looked at him. Their eyes rested on each other for a moment, and then his caique shot ahead around another turn in the little river.

Mihri was now really excited. She looked at her governess, but Mademoiselle's back had been turned to the strangers, and as usual her thoughts seemed far away. Ikbal began to whis-

per in Mihri's ear, and the caique went slowly up the stream, past the place where the open air concerts are held, with the lattice screen on the other bank behind which the ladies sit, and at the third turning they came upon the strange boat again, lying upon its oars.

This time the young officer leant forward with a reckless eagerness and gazed at Mihri as if he could not turn his eyes away. And alas! in spite of the good bringing up of Hosnah, Mademoiselle, and Adilah Hanoum, Mihri looked at him and smiled.

But this time Hosnah caught the look, and turning, saw to whom it was directed. She hastily whispered in Mademoiselle's ear, and the latter turned to the rowers and uttered the single word, "Tchingeltchin," in a tone which they did not fail to understand. The caique whirled round so swiftly that her stern struck the bow of the other boat, and both rocked from the collision. Ikbal and Hosnah screamed, but Mihri only turned and looked over her shoulder

as she was borne away, and the young officer, with unheard of boldness, leant forward and kissed his hand to her.

Back again through the green windings of the enchanted river, past the velvet lawn, the fountain, and the palace, the caique floated once more in the blue and silver of the Bosphorus. Hosnah scolded both the girls with perfect impartiality till she lost her breath, but no one minded her scolding, and Mademoiselle, whose disapproval was much more serious, remained silent and pensive, and said nothing. When they reached home again, they went into the garden, and Mihri and Ikbal talked of nothing but their adventure for the rest of the evening. In the springtime of life, each little event is magnified, and the girls are the same in the Orient as in the Occident.

The next morning when at ten o'clock, as usual, Mihri Hanoum went to kiss the hand of her grandmother, followed by her suite, it was evident to them, when they entered the antechamber,

by the stir and flutter among the slaves, that something unusual was going on. With some excitement, therefore, they entered the special salon and the august presence of Adilah Hanoum.

This salon, large and square, with three windows at one side, was painted and gilded with flowers, birds, and a blue sky in the Italian style. The curtains and divans were of yellow satin embroidered in gold; a magnificent Persian rug covered the floor; and mirrors of all shapes and sizes, in frames of gold, silver, and inlaid woods, decorated the walls; at one side, in a niche, a stream of water flowed into an alabaster shell. In the centre of the room stood an antique brass brazier on a massive tray, and over it hung one of those glass chandeliers which are made in Bohemia for the Oriental market, all red and green and gold.

It was a typical modern Turkish salon of the highest class, a room in which the eye sought for rest, but consoled itself with glitter and colour in-

stead. It presented not the real and artistic splendour of the Orient, but the afterglow of the modern East.

Adilah Hanoum was seated on a divan between her two cousins, Théméne and Edibai Hanoum. She was a tall and imposing-looking woman, still handsome in her sixtieth year. She wore a long robe of purple satin, an India scarf hanging over her shoulders (like the ladies in the books of beauty) and on her head a turban made out of a white silk handkerchief and fastened with a diamond pin. The two cousins were not particular about their dress, and wore old wrappers of faded silk, though their turbans were of immaculate white, and equally immaculate white stockings adorned their feet, for, like many other Oriental women, they loved to walk about without their slippers in the house. They were both elderly, and Théméne took snuff out of a silver box, while Edibai always had a cigarette in her mouth.

Mihri advanced and kissed her grandmother's hand, and after her Made-

moiselle, Hosnah, and Ikbal repeated this act of homage.

"Mihri," said Adilah Hanoum, "sit beside me. I have something to tell you."

Whereupon the two cousins arose and moved several paces down the divan, and Mihri and her governess took their places, while Ikbal and Hosnah tranquilly seated themselves on the floor.

"Mademoiselle," said the Hanoum, addressing the governess first, in Turkish, (the only language she spoke, and which the Frenchwoman had long since learned), "you have been with us now four years, and I take for granted that you have in that time taught my granddaughter everything which it is necessary for her to know."

"Madame," replied the governess, "I have taught her all that she desired to learn."

Adilah Hanoum accepted the answer and we may accept the fact that Mihri was not over-educated.

"Her education being then finished,"

pursued the Hanoum, "the time for her marriage has arrived. Being transferred to the care of her husband, she will no longer need a governess; but you will remain with us as long as you desire, and if that be for ever."

"Madame," replied the Frenchwoman, "I thank you for all your kindness, but when Mihri Hanoum is married, I will, if you permit me, return to France."

The Hanoum then turned to Mihri.

"My child," she said, "your betrothed, Murad Bey, has returned to Stamboul. His grandfather, Hafiz Pacha, was here yesterday. He and Ezzid Pacha have arranged everything, and the marriage will take place in June."

"So soon!" cried Mihri; "but dear grandmother, I do not like——"

"My child," said the Hanoum, "you will like whatever your grandparents arrange for you. They know best."

Mihri took her grandmother's hand and kissed it. "I beg your pardon, grandmother," she said, "but I have one thing to ask, may I not see Murad Bey?"

"If it can be conveniently arranged," replied the Hanoum, "but here it is difficult, for our windows do not command the entrance to the Salamlik; but we will see. To-day I am going to Stamboul to choose the stuffs for your trousseau."

"May I go with you?" asked Mihri.

"No, I think it better not. My cousins will accompany me, and I shall also take Hosnah, since the nurse has the right to be consulted in a matter of such importance."

Ikbal began to beg that Mihri and herself might go too, and Adilah Hanoum, who had a weakness for the irrepressible Circassian, began to hesitate, when Mihri herself cut the argument short, saying, "No, it is better not. We will go instead to the Sweet Waters of Asia."

Ikbal said no more, and neither Mademoiselle nor Hosnah thought of the adventure of yesterday, but had Adilah Hanoum only known the reason of her granddaughter's docility, she would

certainly have been taken to the bazaars.

The ladies departed for Stamboul, and the young girls amused themselves for the morning in the garden, and four o'clock saw them once more in their caique on their way to the Sweet Waters of Asia. Mademoiselle seemed more absorbed than ever. Her gaze was fixed with intensity on the shining Bosphorus, and the flowering Asiatic hills, but she saw nothing but the dim grey coast of France. Mihri and Ikbal were excited with that delicious excitement of early youth, blended of hope and fear. They looked about them on all sides and had not long to wait.

At the very mouth of the Sweet Waters the caique of yesterday lay rocking on the ripples, the boatmen resting on their oars. In it was the handsome young officer, but instead of his former companion, a good-looking young man with fair hair, evidently a foreigner, and perhaps a German or Austrian officer.

The moment their caique approached

Mihri felt the black eyes fixed on her, and she did not resist the temptation of returning the glance and with a smile. Ikbal, who now felt that she had something to live for also, looked at the blond, and he returned her look, and seemed quite ready to meet her half-way.

The ladies' boat moved slowly up the stream, and the strangers', which had evidently been waiting for them, followed. The Sweet Waters were as deserted as they had been the day before, and the two boats, keeping close together, floated through all the windings of the little river, and the occupants of the boats had its green glimmerings all for themselves. Mademoiselle noticed nothing, and though the Armenian, who sat as usual in the bow, took in the situation very well, it was not his place to interfere. The two young men gazed at the girls uninterruptedly, and they (alas! that it must be told) looked at them over their shoulders every other moment. It was an ideal Turkish love scene.

High up the stream they found a bed of violets. Mihri had a fancy for the purple flowers, so they alighted on the soft green bank among the tangled ferns, and each of the young girls picked herself a great bunch of violets.

The men dared not follow, for the south bank on which the violets grew is the ladies' shore, and sacred to them only. They remained instead in their caique, and on the backward route, being in the lead, they looked backward to meet the smiling eyes of the girls that were turned upon them.

When they reached the mouth of the Sweet Waters, Ezzid Pacha's rowers shot ahead. Mihri turned back for one more look, and yielding to a sudden impulse, threw her violets into the water. A ripple washed them to the other boat; the young officer leaned forward, picked them up, and pressed them to his lips and to his heart.

When they reached home, the harem was in the liveliest state of excitement. Adilah Hanoum and her suite had re-

turned from Stamboul, and had brought with them silks, muslins, velvet and gold embroideries, the choice of the bazaars. The slaves were all in the salon unrolling and examining the stuffs before putting them away. Twilight was falling, but all the candles were lit in the bell glasses of the Bohemian chandelier.

Adilah Hanoum was not present, which removed all restraint, but Théméne Hanoum sat in one corner taking snuff and Edibai Hanoum in another telling her beads and smoking the usual cigarette; while Hosnah stood in the midst of an excited group relating the adventures of the bazaar. The scene was one to which no feminine heart could remain cold. Mihri and Ikbal threw themselves into the situation without reserve. No one asked them about their adventures, and for the moment, they forgot them themselves.

The next day Adilah Hanoum was very much occupied with the arrangements for the trousseau. Every one in

the harem was busy and Mihri and Ikbal ran about like a couple of will-o' the-wisps, until Adilah Hanoum declared that they were in everybody's way, and ordered Mademoiselle to take them out of the house.

"Where, Madame?" asked the governess.

"Any quiet place where they will be out of mischief. The Sweet Waters of Asia."

Destiny! To the Sweet Waters of Asia they went, and Mihri's lover was already waiting for her there. The foreigner was with him again, so that Ikbal also had an occupation.

But this time they led the way up the stream, and Mihri's boat followed. A better arrangement, since the Armenian and the rowers had their backs towards the strangers, while Mihri and Ikbal to look at them did not have to turn round.

The Turkish officer held in his hand a single long-stemmed red rose, such as were not yet in bloom in the gardens of

the Bosphorus, and when the narrowest part of the Sweet Waters had been reached, he laid it gently on a ripple, and it floated down to Mihri, who caught it in her left hand as if it had been a water lily. She held it, looked at it, but dared not kiss it, and only bent her pretty head and inhaled its perfume.

"Mihri," said her governess, breaking suddenly from her reveries, "where did you get that rose?"

"I found it in the water," answered Mihri.

Mademoiselle looked around uneasily, observed the other boat, and caught a glance from the Armenian, which showed her that something was wrong.

"We will go home," she said, "back to Tchingeltchin."

The caique turned round and was rowed slowly down the stream but the other caique followed, and when they reached the meadow with the fountain it did not stop as usual but still followed at a little distance down the Bosphorus. Mihri and Ikbal were frightened at this,

and only dared to look back over their shoulders now and then. Their boat went on and stopped at their own garden stairs, and the other one came on and passed, and they saw nothing more, for the garden door was shut behind them.

But just below was the regular village landing and here the strangers stopped, alighted, and entered a little café. The host, an obsequious Syrian, came forward and made them welcome. Coffee and cigarettes were quickly brought and presently the young officer asked carelessly, "Whose is the long white house with the two gardens?"

"That, Bey Effendi," replied the Syrian, "is the house of Ezzid Pacha."

"And who are the ladies who just entered there from their caique?"

"Ah," said the Syrian, who now saw the trend of these remarks, "that is the Pacha's granddaughter and her governess, and a slave who is always with her. In summer we see them every day."

"Your coffee is very good," said the

officer, and rising to go, he tossed him a piece of gold.

The next day it rained so that Mihri could not go out, but owing to the preparations, it was a busy one in the harem. In the afternoon, Ezzid Pacha sent for his granddaughter, and had a long talk with her, in which he explained to her all the arrangements for, and conditions of, her marriage, a mark of consideration by which Mihri was duly impressed.

The wedding would take place in a month, and Mihri heard to her great relief that she was not to leave home but would continue to live with her grandparents. The long unused wing of the harem was to be fitted up for her occupation.

Hafiz Pacha and his family lived in Broussa, and he came only occasionally to Constantinople, as now, to meet his son. Murad Bey, however, was to be stationed there, having received a commission in the Sultan's guards, so that this was the best, in fact, the only suitable arrangement.

In the subject of her dowry, Mihri was too young to be interested, but she thanked her grandfather with much grace and sweetness for all he was doing for her, without troubling herself to think what it was. When, however, at the end of the conversation, he told her that she would be given her mother's diamonds, she was indeed pleased, and kissed the Pacha's hand with a very real and lively gratitude.

Her destiny was now fixed, and she accepted it with Oriental resignation. But at the same time she felt that she had one more month to enjoy herself, and the next afternoon saw her once more with her suite on her way to the Sweet Waters of Asia.

The day was warm and bright, and there were several boats on the little stream, and some people strolling on the banks among the ferns, but to Mihri the place seemed empty, for her lover was not there.

On their return home, they found the harem again in a state of commotion.

Hafiz Pacha and Murad Bey had arrived and were with Ezzid Pacha in the Salamlik.

"Had you been a little sooner," whispered Théméne Hanoum in Mihri's ear, "you would have seen him. He and his father landed in the village, and walked around the garden wall, so that we who were sitting in the kiosk, saw them very well."

"What is he like?" asked Mihri.

"Oh, a fine young man," replied Théméne, "but all young men look alike to me." And she took a pinch of snuff.

Two or three of the slaves who had seen him also described him, much more in detail, but in their excitement, their descriptions differed so materially that Mihri knew no more about her fiancé than she did before, and as he and his father remained to supper with Ezzid Pacha there was no possibility of seeing him again that night.

The next morning the workmen, who were to fit up the wing, arrived, and for

that and the two succeeding days, Adilah Hanoum took her granddaughter, the two cousins, the governess, and Ikbal (from whom Mihri would never be separated) out to visit various families of relatives, up and down the Bosphorus.

Mihri liked visiting as a rule, but now she felt a strange impatience and a desire to be elsewhere, and she longed, with a longing that was more than fancy, to see her unknown lover once more. At last, on the fourth day, her desire was fulfilled; she went again to the Sweet Waters and found him awaiting her there.

There was, as on the last occasion, a number of other people on the water and on the banks, which made any demonstrations impossible. Mihri and her lover could only look at each other, but as their boats kept close together, this they did to their hearts' content.

The meetings continued for some days, and at the same time the preparations for the marriage progressed, and the wedding day approached.

The excitement of the adventure had carried Mihri along so far, but now her joyous mood changed suddenly to melancholy, for now she realised what she had done. She was in love with one man, and about to be married to another. Young as she was, her heart told her what this meant, but her love was greater than her fear of the unhappiness which must follow, and she did not try to save herself. Every day she still went to the Sweet Waters, and every day her lover met her there.

Sometimes he was accompanied by the foreigner, who always flirted with Ikbal, sometimes by the officer who had been with him at first, and sometimes he was alone. But always, he showed that he had come for the sole purpose of seeing Mihri, and it was as real a love affair as is possible in the Orient. That it should have been allowed to proceed was the unusual element in the situation.

Its continuance was owing to several favouring circumstances. Mademoiselle

was distrait and took no notice. Ikbal was in full sympathy. Hosnah was so interested in what was going on at home that she very seldom accompanied the party; and Adilah Hanoum was, of course, in ignorance of the whole affair.

And so it drifted on. Almost every afternoon saw the lovers at the Sweet Waters of Asia; Mihri joyous and thinking of nothing else for the time, but, on her return home, losing all her spirits and sinking into melancholy and silence. The latter mood aroused but little comment, for the reason that the other inmates of the harem thought it merely affected and quite proper for a bride-elect, and besides she was most of the time, with her own attendants and apart from the rest.

What preyed most upon her mind was the thought of what would happen after her marriage. Would she still go to the Sweet Waters and still meet him there, and if so, what then? She lay awake at night and thought of this as she had never thought of anything be-

fore, and by day she discussed it with Ikbal, but it was a question to which they could find no answer.

The month of May was passing. The weather grew warmer and more brilliant every day, and the roses bloomed in the gardens of the Bosphorus. The preparations were almost completed, and the wedding day drew near. A few more trips to the Sweet Waters, a few more love scenes, and already it was June. A brilliant crescent glimmered in the east and Mihri looked at it, and knew that when it was full she would be a bride.

Every evening, after the workmen had left, the ladies and slaves went in with candles in bell glasses to inspect the progress in the bridal apartments. The first room was decorated in white and gold with panels in crimson brocade. The furniture, which had been ordered in Vienna, had not yet arrived, but already there hung from the ceiling a crystal chandelier.

The bedroom, which came next, was Oriental, papered with a bright Chinese

paper and furnished with yellow satin curtains and divans. A large, gilded, Turkish bed with a square canopy stood at one side, but the curtains and coverlet had not yet come home. Beyond were two small rooms, which were fitted up as dressing-rooms, half European, half Oriental in style. The young people were to take their meals with the family, so that there was no occasion for a dining-room and the lower floor of the wing had been left undisturbed.

All this was for her and for her husband, but Mihri observed it all with but a languid interest. This was her destiny, but she hardly wondered any longer what Murad Bey was like. She only felt that he was not the one she loved.

A few days more and the furniture arrived from Vienna, gilded tables and chairs and sofas in crimson, brocade, crimson curtains, and two beautiful mirrors in gold frames. Everything was rich, florid, baroque and dear to the Oriental eye and heart.

Then two inlaid Damascus tables and a magnificent inlaid chest were placed in the yellow room, and the hangings for the bed, white satin embroidered in gold. Last of all there was hung from the ceiling a wonderful old silver lamp, from which the twinkling lights looked out through pink glass, filling with a rose-coloured twilight the bridal chamber. Persian rugs were laid on all the floors, perfumes were sprinkled about, and all was furnished and ready.

Mihri went for the last time to the Sweet Waters of Asia. Her lover was waiting for her and his look was radiant. But Mihri was so sad that she could hardly smile. He could know nothing of her approaching marriage, or that this meeting was their last; but she, alas! could think of nothing else, and when her eyes met his, they filled with tears. One last look at parting, a long farewell to love.

Then she was rowed back along the Bosphorus, and when she reached home, she shut herself up alone with

Ikbal, and gave way to a passion of tears. It was over; the rose had faded and dropped its petals, and left only the thorn in her hand. Mademoiselle was wrong, one could be just as happy and just as unhappy in Turkey as in France.

Why had they ever met? Why had she gone to the Sweet Waters of Asia? The next day was the one before the wedding. In the evening the contract was to be signed; and on this occasion there is always what one would call a stag party in the Salamlik, including the male relatives and friends of both sides.

In the harem, only the ladies related to the family and a few of Adilah Hanoum's old friends were assembled.

When they had all arrived and were seated around the grand salon, Mihri was led in by two young girls (as is the invariable custom in the East) whom we would call the bridesmaids. She wore a dress of white Servian muslin, striped with pink and gold, and her beautiful hair fell unadorned in its two

long plaits for the last time. To-morrow she would wear the bridal turban.

Custom requires the Oriental bride to walk with feigned reluctance and to be dragged along by the young girls who conduct her. For Mihri, this required no effort; her reluctance, alas! was real. She was led first to her grandmother, before whom she knelt to receive her bridal gift. Adilah-Hanoum gave her an inlaid Mecca casket in which, on purple velvet, glittered the diamond necklace and tiara which had been her mother's. Mihri received the jewels in silence, kissed both her grandmother's hands, and rising went on round the circle, receiving from each one her bridal gift, and kissing all the ladies' hands.

The gifts varied: some were jewels, some gold and silver, some scarfs and shawls, and some *flacons* of perfume. Théméne and Edibai Hanoum, being poor dependents, had nothing to give; but, that they might not be left out, one had been given the diamond bracelets, and the other the earrings of Mihri's

mother, and they now presented them with imperturbable dignity and grace. Hosnah and Ikbal, who followed Mihri, took the presents from her, and carried them into the next room, where they were locked up in two glass cabinets.

When the presentations were over, Mihri took her place between the bridesmaids on the divan, little tables were brought in by the slaves, and a supper in many courses was served. Afterwards the ladies sat smoking cigarettes for a while, and the party was an early one, that they might all be fresh for the morrow. By ten o'clock, they had all kissed the bride and had said good-night.

The next day was cloudless, beautiful, and sweet with the scent of roses. All the morning the entire household of Ezzid Pacha was in a state of intense excitement. Arches of coloured lanterns and glittering balls were erected at the entrance of the two gardens, and garlands of flowers were hung over the doors. Inside, the choicest rugs and cushions were placed about; all the chandeliers

filled with wax candles; perfumes sprinkled, and vases and bowls of roses scattered everywhere.

At three o'clock, Mihri Hanoum retired to her room to be dressed, and at five the company began to arrive, a crowd of caiques succeeding each other in line at the entrances to the Salamlik and the harem, and a few carriages also driving up on the land side.

Ezzid Pacha, Hafiz Pacha, and the bridegroom, Murad Bey, received their guests in the salon of the Salamlik, and they were arranged according to relationship and rank on the divans where they were to sit talking and smoking cigarettes for hours with Oriental patience and serenity.

In the harem, the scene was much more brilliant. The slaves all had new dresses for the occasion, and were brilliant as a bed of tulips in crimson and purple and pink.

Adilah Hanoum received her guests standing between her cousins, in the yellow salon, in a long trained Turkish

dress of purple velvet embroidered in gold. On her head she wore a diamond tiara and a cap of point lace, and diamonds glittered about her like stars of a summer night.

The ladies were all dressed in their best, and each one brought with her her favourite slave, also in gala attire; and the effect of colour and the glitter of gold and jewels was such as can be seen nowhere but in the Orient. Slaves ran about with baskets of cigarettes and the ladies were soon all seated in the various rooms smoking and chatting gaily, awaiting the appearance of the bride.

At six o'clock the two bridesmaids arose from their places, and went in search of the bride. Everyone waited in breathless excitement, and in a few moments, the procession appeared. Two eunuchs (lent for the occasion by friends, since Ezzid Pacha kept none himself), in frock coats and fez, walked first, tossing money in the air, which was eagerly picked up by the slaves.

Then came the two bridesmaids, one in white and one in blue, leading one by each hand the bride, Mademoiselle, Hosnah, and Ikbal bringing up the rear.

Mihri was dressed in modern Turkish style, or what we should call a princess dress, of white gauze spangled with gold over pink satin, cut V-shaped in the neck and clasped around her waist with a flexible girdle of gold. On her head she wore the bridal turban of white tulle, which made a background for her diamond tiara, and from it hung the two invariable skeins of gold wire over her shoulders, down almost to the ground. The diamond necklace, bracelets, and earrings, and a large medallion of diamonds and pearls, which her father had sent her from Rome, completed her attire. She made a beautiful and resplendent Turkish bride.

The procession moved across the central hall, all the women following in excited confusion, and entered the salon of the bridal apartments, where, facing the entrance door, had been

erected the bridal throne. This, as usual, consisted of a raised dais covered with crimson satin, and a crimson canopy with long sweeping curtains supported by two columns, from which hung two long thick skeins of gold wire, like those worn by the bride.

Under the canopy two heavy gilt chairs stood side by side, and in one of these Mihri was placed, while Ikbal, gorgeous in sky-blue brocaded in silver and a turban of spangled tulle, sat at her feet, and fanned her with a fan of peacock feathers. All the women walked around her and admired her to their hearts' content, and Mihri sat and looked straight in front of her, apparently calm and unmoved. She was unhappy, and thought, with the despair of youth, which knows no hope (and is so soon forgotten), to be unhappy always; but she was an Oriental and outwardly, at least, she had accepted her destiny.

For half an hour she sat there, and then returned to her own apartments, while the dinner was served. The

bridesmaids rejoined the other ladies, and Hosnah and Ikbal alone remained with the bride, serving her with the many courses of the banquet, and vainly coaxing her to eat, for she could not.

After dinner various amusements were provided for the guests, such as singing and dancing girls, and an East Indian woman who delighted them with juggling tricks.

Then came the second entrée of the bride, who was led in by her bridesmaids and seated on the throne to be admired as before, the principal difference being that she had changed her dress to one of white satin embroidered in gold, though her turban, her gold skeins, and her jewels were still the same. Another half-hour she spent in presence of the company, and then once more retired.

The time wore on, and at length the eunuchs, who ran backwards and forwards between the harem and the Salamlik, announced that the bridegroom had started for the mosque, and

all the women crowded to the front windows to watch through the lattices for his return. In a quarter of an hour their patience was rewarded by the sight of a long line of glimmering lights coming down the lane beyond the garden walls. Twelve servants walking first, easily counted as they were all in white, and then a double line of red fezes, black coats and uniforms, the young friends of Murad Bey, and in their midst the bridegroom himself, quite undistinguishable from the rest.

The procession turned the corner, and was lost to sight, and now most of the ladies began to put on their yashmaks and ferejehs and to take their leave. Only the relatives remained, and they assembled solemnly in the salon of Adilah Hanoum, while the house slaves all in their yashmaks waited in the central hall. The hour of midnight had struck, and with it the great moment had come.

The bride appeared for the third time, still in her white dress, but this time

covered from head to foot with a gold-striped veil. She was led to the crimson salon, and stood there like a statue with Hosnah and Ikbal veiled behind her.

A prayer rug was spread beside her. Adilah Hanoum and Mademoiselle took their places opposite, and everyone else withdrew. There was a pause of a moment or two, but to Mihri it seemed like an hour.

Then footsteps were heard in the hall, the portière was lifted, and the two eunuchs, each with a lighted candle in a bell glass, entered the room, followed by the bridegroom. Mihri's veil was thick and through it she distinguished only the red fez and the gold that glittered on his uniform. Murad Bey advanced, knelt on the rug, turning towards Mecca, said his prayer, touched the ground with his forehead three times, and then arose.

For a moment he seemed to hesitate, and then, encouraged by a sign from Adilah Hanoum, took the bride's veil by the hem, and lifted it slowly. Hoshan

and Ikbal pulled it from behind, and suddenly it came off entirely, and Mihri stood revealed in all her splendour.

Murad Bey clasped his hands with a cry of delight, and Mihri looked at him and saw her lover of the Sweet Waters of Asia. The crimson salon reeled and swam around her. Rainbows danced before her eyes, and music of unearthly sweetness sounded in her ears.

For Murad there was no surprise. He had known since their third meeting, when he had followed her home, that the young woman with whom he had fallen in love at first sight was his own betrothed; and, with that manly superiority which takes everything for granted, he had supposed that Mihri knew him also. But now he read in her eyes and in her smile, and in the sunset flush that mantled in her cheeks, the glory and the joy of her surprise.

They loved each other, and their love did not and had never needed words. They only needed, as now, to look at each other. The first act of an Oriental

husband must be to give his bride a present; Murad, remembering this a moment later, drew from his pocket, a medallion of rubies and diamonds, in the centre of which was his miniature painted on ivory, and gave it to Mihri, who pinned it on over her heart. Then, taking her by the hand, he led her up on the dais, where they took their places in the two gilt chairs.

Adilah and the other women hastened to leave the room, and the portières were dropped behind them. They were alone and now indeed they spoke, words of love and sealed with kisses, but words and kisses which we have no right to see or hear. The relatives and friends are all gone, and we must follow. The entertainment is over, and the candles are being put out.

"Oh sweet illusions of the brain!
Oh sudden thrills of fire and frost!
The world is bright while ye remain!
And dark and dead when ye are lost."

Appendix

THE FLOWER OF DESTINY

The loves of Ferhad and Sira have been a favourite theme of the Oriental poets, who have told their story in many different ways. This story is entirely my own and rests on the single historical fact that Sira, a Christian slave and the favourite of Chosroes whom she ruled by her beauty and wit, had a lover named Ferhad, a young man of wonderful beauty.

The history of Chosroes is sufficiently dramatic to need no embellishment. The Mohammedan writers ascribe all his misfortunes to his impious act in tearing the letter of Mohammed.

After his defeat by Heraclius, he was driven not indeed into exile again, but from place to place in his own kingdom, and was finally murdered in the year 628 by Siroes his son and the son of

Sira, this end making the vengeance of Heaven complete.

To the shade of Ferhad, I must offer my sincere apologies. He was neither a traitor to his country nor to his love, but remained true to Sira to the end; but had I told the story thus there would be no moral.

THE LAST OF THE FATIMITES

This is not an historical tale. The chronological setting and the sketch of Saladdin are correct; but Ali Amr, Rikaiya, Tchagane, and the other actors are entirely my own creation.

THE NEW MOON OF ISLAM

Lew Wallace makes this Hassan the victim of Murza who hurls him from the walls. A fiction which needs no denial, as Iskander Bey (George Castriot), the original of Murza, had already in the lifetime of Murad deserted the standard of the Turks, and we can more readily forgive the wilful murder of Hassan

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M. Mordecai
The Flower of Destiny.
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